

# The Andover Review

A JOURNAL FOR SECONDARY EDUCATION



Spring 1974

*Creativity*

Taking a deep breath, we plunge into the murky waters of journalism and secondary education. As we indicated in our prospectus, *The Andover Review* is a journal devoted to what has hitherto been a somewhat neglected field, secondary education, public and private, North and South, East and West.

This issue, as will be the case in future issues, is based upon a theme. We have chosen creativity because it is, these days, much on the minds of students and teachers. As will be seen in the reading, the term is difficult to define. For this reason we lead off with Branowski's *The Creative Process*, which first appeared in the *Scientific American*, September, 1958. It is a provocative treatment and has called forth the reactions of J. Zucker and H. Blau which follow it. We asked W. Myers, a teacher of Greek and Latin, to take a critical view of the process, and he has obliged. J. Ratte looks at creativity from the view of the historian. Three practitioners next give their views on creativity: M. Mott talks of poetry to students in Richmond, T. Mayer speculates about the teaching of creative writing in New Mexico, and E. Vilella answers questions about dance in the development of the student. In the following three articles we finally get to the schools, three very different schools, in Gainesville, Georgia; Denver, Colorado; and Danville, California. We end this section with a commencement address given at the Bread Loaf School of English last summer by A. B. Giammatti.

The review section consists of two reviews. We hope in future issues to expand this section. We have also included poems which, if they do not center on our theme, do direct attention to our wider concern with education. We have ended up with a range of subject, contributors, and geography which can be called national. We are pleased with the result and grateful to our contributors.

If we are to continue to have this range and if we are to extend it, we must have contributions from students and teachers of public and private schools, indeed from all who wish to address themselves to secondary education in the form of articles, poems, graphics, and reviews. These should be sent to THE ANDOVER REVIEW, Phillips Academy, Andover, Mass, 01810.

The theme for the summer issue will be innovative educational practices set against teaching within traditional structures. We welcome, however, any work which bears upon secondary education.

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# The Creative Process

*“...when a single mind perceives  
in disorder a deep new unity”*

J. BRONOWSKI

**T**he most remarkable discovery made by scientists is science itself. The discovery must be compared in importance with the invention of cave-painting and of writing. Like these earlier human creations, science is an attempt to control our surroundings by entering into them and understanding them from inside. And like them, science has surely made a critical step in human development which cannot be reversed. We cannot conceive a future society without science.

I have used three words to describe these far-reaching changes: discovery, invention and creation. There are contexts in which one of these words is more appropriate than the others. Christopher Columbus discovered the West Indies, and Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone. We do not call their achievements creations because they are not personal enough. The West Indies were there all the time; as for the telephone, we feel that Bell's ingenious thought was somehow not fundamental. The groundwork was there, and if not Bell then someone else would have stumbled on the telephone as casually as on the West Indies.

By contrast, we feel that *Othello* is genuinely a creation. This is

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Reprinted from *Scientific American*, September, 1958.



not because *Othello* came out of a clear sky; it did not. There were Elizabethan dramatists before Shakespeare, and without them he could not have written as he did. Yet within their tradition *Othello* remains profoundly personal; and though every element in the play has been a theme of other poets, we know that the amalgam of these elements is Shakespeare's; we feel the presence of his single mind. The Elizabethan drama would have gone on without Shakespeare, but no one else would have written *Othello*.

There are discoveries in science like Columbus's, of something which was always there: the discovery of sex in plants, for example. There are tidy inventions like Bell's, which combine a set of known principles: the use of a beam of electrons as a microscope, for example. In this article I ask the question: Is there anything more? Does a scientific theory, however deep, ever reach the roundness, the expression of a whole personality that we get from *Othello*?

A fact is discovered, a theory is invented; is any theory ever deep enough for it to be truly called a creation? Most nonscientists would answer: No! Science, they would say, engages only part of the mind—the rational intellect—but creation must engage the whole mind. Science demands none of that groundswell of emotion, none of that rich bottom of personality, which fills out the work of art.

This picture by the nonscientist of how a scientist works is of course mistaken. A gifted man cannot handle bacteria or equations without taking fire from what he does and having his emotions engaged. It may happen that his emotions are immature, but then so are the intellects of many poets. When Ella Wheeler Wilcox died, having published poems from the age of seven, *The Times* of London wrote that she was "the most popular poet of either sex and of any age, read by thousands who never open Shakespeare." A scientist who is emotionally immature is like a poet who is intellectually backward: both produce work which appeals to others like them, but which is second-rate.

I am not discussing the second-rate, and neither am I discussing

all that useful but commonplace work which fills most of our lives, whether we are chemists or architects. There are in my laboratory of the British National Coal Board about 200 industrial scientists—pleasant, intelligent, sprightly people who thoroughly earn their pay. It is ridiculous to ask whether they are creators who produce works that could be compared with *Othello*. They are men with the same ambitions as other university graduates, and their work is most like the work of a college department of Greek or of English. When the Greek departments produce a Sophocles, or the English departments produce a Shakespeare, then I shall begin to look in my laboratory for a Newton.

Literature ranges from Shakespeare to Ella Wheeler Wilcox, and science ranges from relativity to market research. A comparison must be of the best with the best. We must look for what is created in the deep scientific theories: in Copernicus and Darwin, in Thomas Young's theory of light and in William Rowan Hamilton's equations, in the pioneering concepts of Freud, of Bohr and of Pavlov.

The most remarkable discovery made by scientists, I have said, is science itself. It is therefore worth considering the history of this discovery, which was not made all at once but in two periods. The first period falls in the great age of Greece, between 600 B.C. and 300 B.C. The second period begins roughly with the Renaissance, and is given impetus at several points by the rediscovery of Greek mathematics and philosophy.

When one looks at these two periods of history, it leaps to the eye that they were not specifically scientific. On the contrary: Greece between Pythagoras and Aristotle is still, in the minds of most scholars, a shining sequence of classical texts. The Renaissance is still thought of as a rebirth of art, and only specialists are uncouth enough to link it also with what is at last being called, reluctantly, the Scientific Revolution. The accepted view of Greece and of the Renaissance is that they were the great creative periods of literature and art. Now that we recognize in them also the two periods in which science was born, we must surely ask whether this conjunction is accidental. Is it a coincidence that Phidias and

the Greek dramatists lived in the time of Socrates? Is it a coincidence that Galileo shared the patronage of the Venetian republic with sculptors and painters? Is it a coincidence that, when Galileo was at the height of his intellectual power, there were published in England in the span of 12 years the following three works: the Authorized Version of the Bible, the First Folio of Shakespeare and the first table of logarithms?

### *contemplation vs. action*

The sciences and the arts have flourished together. And they have been fixed together as sharply in place as in time. In some way both spring from one civilization: the civilization of the Mediterranean, which expresses itself in action. There are civilizations which have a different outlook; they express themselves in contemplation, and in them neither science nor the arts are practiced as such. For a civilization which expresses itself in contemplation values no creative activity. What it values is a mystic immersion in nature, the union with what already exists.

The contemplative civilization we know best is that of the Middle Ages. It has left its own monuments, from the Bayeux Tapestry to the cathedrals; and characteristically they are anonymous. The Middle Ages did not value the cathedrals, but only the act of worship which they served. It seems to me that the works of Asia Minor and of India (if I understand them) have the same anonymous quality of contemplation, and like the cathedrals were made by craftsmen rather than by artists. For the artist as a creator is personal; he cannot drop his work and have it taken up by another without doing it violence. It may be odd to claim the same personal engagement for the scientist; yet in this the scientist stands to the technician much as the artist stands to the craftsman. It is at least remarkable that science has not flourished either in an anonymous age, such as the age of medieval crafts, or in an anonymous place, such as the craftsmanlike countries of the East.

The change from an outlook of contemplation to one of action is striking in the long transition of the Renaissance and the Scien-

tific Revolution. The new men, even when they are churchmen, have ideals which are flatly opposed to the monastic and withdrawn ideals of the Middle Ages. Their outlook is active, whether they are artists, humanistic scholars or scientists.

The new man is represented by Leonardo da Vinci whose achievement has never, I think, been rightly understood. There is an obvious difference between Leonardo's painting and that of his elders—between, for example, an angel painted by him and one by Verrocchio. It is usual to say that Leonardo's angel is more human and more tender; and this is true, but it misses the point. Leonardo's pictures of children and of women are human and tender; yet the evidence is powerful that Leonardo liked neither children nor women. Why then did he paint them as if he were entering their lives? Not because he saw them as people, but because he saw them as expressive parts of nature. We do not understand the luminous and transparent affection with which Leonardo lingers on a head or a hand until we look at the equal affection with which he paints the grass and the flowers in the same picture.

To call Leonardo either a human or a naturalist painter does not go to the root of his mind. He is a painter to whom the detail of nature speaks aloud; for him, nature expresses herself in the detail. This is a view which other Renaissance artists had; they lavished care on perspective and on flesh tones because these seemed to them (as they had not seemed in the Bayeux Tapestry) to carry the message of nature. But Leonardo went further; he took this artist's vision into science. He understood that science as much as painting has to find the design of nature in her detail.

When Leonardo was born in 1452, science was still Aristotle's structure of cosmic theories, and the criticism of Aristotle in Paris and Padua was equally grandiose. Leonardo distrusted all large theories, and this is one reason why his experiments and machines have been forgotten. Yet he gave science what it most needed, the artist's sense that the detail of nature is significant. Until science had this sense, no one could care—or could think that it mattered—how fast two unequal masses fall and whether the orbits



of the planets are accurately circles or ellipses.

The power which the scientific method has developed has grown from a procedure which the Greeks did not discover: the procedure of induction. This procedure is useless unless it is followed into the detail of nature; its discovery therefore flows from Leonardo's vision.

Francis Bacon in 1620 and Christian Huygens in 1690 set down the intellectual bases of induction. They saw that it is not possible to reach an explanation of what happens in nature by deductive steps. Every explanation goes beyond our experience and thereby becomes a speculation. Huygens says, and philosophers have sheepishly followed him in this, that an explanation should therefore be called probable. He means that no induction is unique; there is always a set—an infinite set—of alternatives between which we must choose.

The man who proposes a theory makes a choice—an imaginative choice which outstrips the facts. The creative activity of science lies here, in the process of induction. For induction imagines more than there is ground for and creates relations which at bottom can never be verified. Every induction is a speculation and it guesses at a unity which the facts present but do not strictly imply.

To put the matter more formally: A scientific theory cannot be constructed from the facts by any procedure which can be laid down in advance, as if for a machine. To the man who makes the theory, it may seem as inevitable as the ending of *Othello* must have seemed to Shakespeare. But the theory is inevitable only to him; it is his choice, as a mind and as a person, among the alternatives which are open to everyone.

There are scientists who deny what I have said—that we are free to choose between alternative theories. They grant that there are alternative theories, but they hold that the choice between them is made mechanically. The principle of choice, in their view, is Occam's Razor: we choose, among the theories which fit the facts we know now, that one which is simplest. On this view, Newton's laws were the simplest theory which covered the facts of gravitation as they were then known; and general relativity is not

a new conception but is the simplest theory which fits the additional facts.

This would be a plausible view if it had a meaning. Alas, it turns out to be a verbal deception, for we cannot define simplicity; we cannot even say what we mean by the simpler of two inductions. The tests which have been proposed are hopelessly artificial and, for example, can compare theories only if they can be expressed in differential equations of the same kind. Simplicity itself turns out to be a principle of choice which cannot be mechanized.

### *simple delusions*

Of course every innovator has thought that his way of arranging the facts is particularly simple, but this is a delusion. Copernicus's theory in his day was not simple to others, because it demanded two rotations of the earth—a daily one and a yearly one—in place of one rotation of the sun. What made his theory seem simple to Copernicus was something else: an esthetic sense of unity. The motion of all the planets around the sun was both simple and beautiful to him, because it expressed the unity of God's design. The same thought has moved scientists ever since: that nature has a unity, and that this unity makes her laws seem beautiful in simplicity.

The scientist's demand that nature shall be lawful is a demand for unity. When he frames a new law, he links and organizes phenomena which were thought different in kind; for example, general relativity links light with gravitation. In such a law we feel that the disorder of nature has been made to reveal a pattern, and that under the colored chaos there rules a more profound unity.

A man becomes creative, whether he is an artist or a scientist, when he finds a new unity in the variety of nature. He does so by finding a likeness between things which were not thought alike before, and this gives him a sense both of richness and of understanding. The creative mind is a mind that looks for unexpected

likenesses. This is not a mechanical procedure, and I believe that it engages the whole personality in science as in the arts. Certainly I cannot separate the abounding mind of Thomas Young (which all but read the Rosetta Stone) from his recovery of the wave theory of light, or the awkwardness of J. J. Thomson in experiment from his discovery of the electron. To me, William Rowan Hamilton drinking himself to death is as much part of his prodigal work as is any drunken young poet; and the childlike vision of Einstein has a poet's innocence.

When Max Planck proposed that the radiation of heat is discontinuous, he seems to us now to have been driven by nothing but the facts of experiment. But we are deceived; the facts did not go so far as this. The facts showed that the radiation is not continuous; they did not show that the only alternative is Planck's hail of quanta. This is an analogy which imagination and history brought into Planck's mind. So the later conflict in quantum physics between the behavior of matter as a wave and as a particle is a conflict between analogies, between poetic metaphors; and each metaphor enriches our understanding of the world without completing it.

In *Auguries of Innocence* William Blake wrote:

*A dog starv'd at his Master's gate  
Predicts the ruin of the State.*

This seems to me to have the same imaginative incisiveness, the same understanding crowded into metaphor, that Planck had. And the imagery is as factual, as exact in observations, as that on which Planck built; the poetry would be meaningless if Blake used the words "dog," "master" and "state" less robustly than he does. Why does Blake say dog and not cat? Why does he say master and not mistress? Because the picture he is creating depends on our factual grasp of the relation between dog and master. Blake is saying that when the master's conscience no longer urges him to respect his dog, the whole society is in decay. This profound thought came to Blake again and again: that a morality expresses itself in what he called its Minute Particulars—

that the moral detail is significant of a society. As for the emotional power of the couplet, it comes, I think, from the change of scale between the metaphor and its application: between the dog at the gate and the ruined state. This is why Blake, in writing it, seems to me to transmit the same excitement that Planck felt when he discovered, no, when he created, the quantum.

One of the values which science has made natural to us is originality; as I said earlier, in spite of appearances science is not anonymous. The growing tradition of science has now influenced the appreciation of works of art, so that we expect both to be original in the same way. We expect artists as well as scientists to be forward-looking, to fly in the face of what is established, and to create not what is acceptable but what will become accepted. One result of this prizing of originality is that the artist now shares the unpopularity of the scientist: the large public dislikes and fears the way that both of them look at the world.

As a more important result, the way in which the artist looks at the world has come close to the scientist's. For example, in what I have written science is pictured as preoccupied less with facts than with relations, less with numbers than with arrangement. This new vision, the search for structure . . . is also marked in modern art. Abstract sculpture often looks like an exercise in topology, exactly because the sculptor shares the vision of the topologist.

The physical sciences are old, and in that time the distance between fact and explanation has lengthened; their very concepts are unrealistic. The biological sciences are young, so that fact and theory look alike; the new entities which have been created to underlie the facts are still representational rather than abstract.



## *THE HOSTLER'S SON AT SCHOOL*

There was a candle that made the cave  
in which it shone—he had that dream.  
The only sound the lack of sound,  
he scribbled on where his hand began  
that line through words toward one  
more word that would open the sky.

When others read maps, and crowded  
to see how the globe would spin,  
he had a spell of more than seeing—  
how little towns leaned, and houses  
came near, and day like a walker came bringing  
the river that followed—  
“Heel. Heel.”

Head to one side, he listened while others  
recited. He saw them like sparrows.  
The lessons they learned, he was.  
A story from a book poured through the room,  
out through the window, out there like sunlight  
drowning a peak in Darien.

WILLIAM STAFFORD

# The Distinguished Heresies of J. Bronowski

*Jack Zucker rushes to the defense of Kuan Yin*

THE ANDOVER REVIEW has reprinted, in this issue, an article by J. Bronowski which attempts a simple task: to construct a 'field theory' of creativity in the arts and sciences, all within 4000 words. This attempt may be brave in a kind of cavalier fashion: Jonathan Swift, dismissing piddling Tibbald and the Royal Academy. But Bronowski, unlike Swift, has different intentions. The Dean, after all, tried to destroy nonsense; Bronowski tries to create profundity, which, in the wrong hands, is exactly the way to produce nonsense.

Bronowski constructs his theory out of a few strained notions, which boil down to this: creativity in the arts and sciences is pretty much the same. Creativity, in fact, is confined to large minds who see new relationships that others miss (these large minds turn out to be the 'big names,' as if only Rembrandt ever painted a masterpiece). In addition, both art and science, as they grow older and more 'mature,' become interested primarily in innovation and abstraction.

Bronowski also seems to accept, without qualification, the

romantic notion of the artist. He will be a man apart from others, able only to live in the mansions of the great or the hovels of the poor. Never will he (or his cousins in the sciences) be found in a middle class or institutional occupation. How can one who will discard (or modify) all previous tradition work contentedly as an insurance executive (Wallace Stevens) or happily be a censor for the Tsar (Ivan Goncharov)? Let's not even talk of the discontented bureaucrats who turned out to be artists (Maupassant, Gogol, Kafka).

It will seem to the reader that I have invented all this. How could a renowned philosopher of science, a biographer of William Blake, be so naive, so facile, so limited by the dogmas of his time as I have implied?

Let the record speak for itself.

*"When the Greek departments produce a Sophocles or the English departments produce a Shakespeare," Bronowski writes, "then I shall begin to look in my laboratory for a Newton."*

First Bronowski starts with a poor analogy. Greek departments teach a dead language. I assume, though exceptions may occur, that most literature is written in live languages.

But why can't English departments produce a Shakespeare? Ted Roethke taught English at Lehigh, Penn State and University of Washington. Maybe his departments didn't *produce* him, but at least one (Seeger's biography clearly points this out) protected him. O.K., Roethke isn't Shakespeare, but he's the nearest thing we've got. James Dickey, in a recent *Atlantic Monthly* article, claims that Roethke is *the* great American poet. I don't care to argue the point, because I prefer Whitman, but Roethke is awfully good, as more and more people are beginning to discover.

Do English departments retard talent or enhance it? That's a big question, a good one, not one that Bronowski raises. So I won't try to settle it, not here.

But look at the eternal arrogance of this new knight-administrator who assumes no geniuses will be found in English

departments. Using the same logic, he could prove that no geniuses would have been found serving the Anglican Church (Swift, Sterne, Donne). I think T. S. Eliot took a master's degree in English, but he quit the racket for a place more likely to produce a Shakespeare, an English bank. But the real piece of arrogance, that smells so profoundly I want to run away at top speed, is the part about Bronowski's own lab. Think of it, if some little guy with spectacles has the nerve to come up to Bronowski with a theory—if he has the nerve to say—"Oh, Mr. Bronowski, sir, I think I've found something very new; in fact, no one has come up with this before"—Bronowski will raise his haughty nose, slam down his haughty fist and squash this guy and his work to smithereens. (Chances are the work would be unimportant—but what of the long shot? What if the guy had produced, not a major vision, but a small miracle?)

Mr. Bronowski, genius is where you find it, helping a tanner in a small town on a provincial island, preaching a sermon in a small church in Ireland, teaching freshman comp at Lehigh, and yes, even working in your own laboratory, hating you because he knows you think he's impossible.

Why, if genius were to be found by Bronowski, it would be between hard covers already, certified by the Nobel Prize committee.

*"The sciences and the arts," Bronowski informs us, "have flourished together. And they have been fixed together as sharply in place as in time. In some way both spring from one civilization: the civilization of the Mediterranean, which expresses itself in action. There are civilizations which have a different outlook: they express themselves in contemplation, and in them neither science nor the arts are practiced as such."*

Well, we have finally finished off that poor slob working in Mr. B.'s laboratory. Now we take care of all the Buddhist sages staring at the ceiling and the equally inactive wood carvers chipping away at an image of the ideal, following traditional forms, at best adding to them, adding some single touch, some human voice.



*"It seems to me that the works of Asia Minor and of India (if I understand them) have the same anonymous quality of contemplation, and like the cathedrals were made by craftsmen rather than by artists. For the artist as a creator is personal; he cannot drop his work and have it taken up by another without doing it violence."*

Well, here goes Bronowski, polishing off the Gooks again, and then, by way of largesse, offering up our heritage of medieval art and the work of sixteenth century painters who collaborated with others. At least Bronowski admits he may not understand Indian art (did you ever see such humbleness?). Seriously speaking, this is argument by *a priori* assumption.

First Bronowski assumes that all art is personal (what does *personal* mean?), and then he proclaims that all traditional art is not personal, and then he declares it is not art at all.

### *art as experience*

I can only be autobiographical here. My favorite place is the Buddhist sculpture room of the Fogg Museum. There I go to commune with three very personal (personal to me) Bodhissatvas. They have come, however, from a tradition even more impersonal than that of the sculptors of Strasbourg Cathedral. And it is only my own imagination, as I sit there on the polished wooden bench, that each has a distinct personality. I know it's my imagination when I talk with them and they give me advice (this happens once in a while). But the personal glow that comes from each came from the hand of an artist, even if the Fogg can only tell me that the artists were "anonymous."

Mr. Bronowski, it is not the personal (certainly not the biographical) in the artist that we know or value. It is the human in the work of art. Maybe you haven't known any dominating, regal women, but I know one who sits there in the Fogg Museum, just like my *alte Bubbe*<sup>1</sup>, except she's Chinese, and she talks to

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1. old grandmother.

me in the same way. She's called Kuan Yin, and she has a history.

Many other representations of Kuan Yin exist, but this one has her own identity. In fact, a couple of others exist in the same room, but none has the same personality. There she sits in the "position of royal ease," and, to be sure, it's a traditional position, and 100,000 anonymous, non-Mediterranean Orientals have also carved Kuan Yin in the same position. And therefore this statue is a work of craft, according to Bronowski, not a work of art. But this specific Kuan Yin, made out of her specific, ragged, regal wood, looks at me with a kind of above-it-all splendor and tells me what I don't know, what I'd like to know, what I should know. She doesn't want me to be a fake Buddhist, or worship her (at least I won't do it). But she wants me to transcend the fellow who itches, feels grimy, lusts, wants to stop work and go over to Elsie's for a knockwurst on roll for only 45¢ (inflation rates).

Well, let's get out of my crazy relationship with the splendid, advice-giving Kuan Yin, whom I sometimes love and sometimes hate. Most visitors to the Fogg don't see her, because they all agree with Bronowski that Indian and Chinese art is for the birds. That gives me a lot of peace and quiet, because all the Bronowskis stay away and look at the Rembrandts. But the Fogg people know how good she is, because they put her front and center in a room almost her own.

And, do you know, Mr. Bronowski, that doesn't matter either, because essentially, not only is art personal vision, as you recognize, but it is personal experience. I am not the only one to have had an experience with Kuan Yin. That is why she is front and center, not down in the cellar. She is beautiful and ugly. Cold and passionate. Luxurious and tattered. Contemplative yet profoundly scornful of those who mistake moments of ease for true insight.

Well, enough of my personal vision. But my personal vision is important. It is important because without it no art, no poetry exists. It will not serve as a definition of creativity or genius. But without it all definitions are so much straw shoved in a crack to keep out the wind.

Even Western geniuses aren't always active. Take Kafka or

Corot. Both were profoundly contemplative.

*In the East, Bronowski tells us, "neither science nor the arts are practiced as such."*

Now, what serves for science in a non-scientific culture, what science is at bottom, is another difficult question. Neither Bronowski nor I will get to the bottom of it in a few pages.

But to think that art is great only if practiced "as such" is to be a victim of grossest deception. Art is most wonderful when it is at the service of another ideal, be it religion (Giotto and George Herbert), morality (Tolstoy and D. H. Lawrence), bitter truth (Flaubert, Swift), or national identity (Whitman, Mussorgsky). Mr. Bronowski, what would your own William Blake have said if you told him his poems were more important than the visions they expressed? He'd have laughed—possibly told you they were one and the same.

*"The growing tradition of science has now influenced the appreciation of works of art," Bronowski writes, "so that we expect both to be original in the same way. We expect artists as well as scientists to be forward-looking, to fly in the face of what is established, and to create not what is acceptable but what will become accepted."*

Well, out goes old Johann Sebastian Bach, the last, stubborn worker in an unfashionable tradition. His sons were all "with it;" their music sounds like Haydn and Mozart. But J. S. sounds like the old guys. Not innovative? Merely excellent and profound? Throw him out the window. He doesn't fit Procruste's bed, now to be called Bronowski's slide rule.

That terrible term "forward-looking"! Sounds like the chief slogan in the platform of some simple-minded socialist group. Who can define what "forward-looking" is? Where is forward anyway? Toward more machines and inventions and weapons? Toward further innovations in art? Where do we go after the minimalist painters or the poetry of Charles Olson? The mind boggles. Innovate past that! We may as well write poetry in phonemes, forget

plain old words. Or just hand in two parallel lines as a drawing.

The artist as innovator. Always changing style. Always offending the ever-offensive bourgeoisie. Is that innovative, Mr. B? That's just the dogma of 1890 and 1910 slicked up for *Scientific American*. It is a dogma that is now outworn and hardly fits our circumstances. The artist, to be sure, hasn't really established a new and satisfactory relationship with the power structure of his society, but if he's honest and searching, he's discarded the clichés about always flying in the face of authority and the middle class. He knows that can be as offensive a pose as catering to the latest whim of Louis XIV or laughing at the latest jest of Lord Chesterfield.

And, if the artist is to assault the "established," what is established these days? Everything changes. Traditions arrive Sunday and vanish Monday. Should the artist fly in the face of what's established? First he'd better sit down for a while and try to figure out what merely *is*. What can he salvage out of the current disarray that all the forward-looking Bronowskis want to perpetuate forever and forever amen?

What can we hold on to? What can we trust? What can we know? These are the questions true artists are asking, tired of doing constant foot service on the treadmill of fad and fashion, tired of endlessly attempting the gimmick pages of *Newsweek* and *Time*.

*And finally Bronowski throws us his most nerve-shaking manifesto. What is forward-looking and sophisticated, he implies, is generally more abstract.*

Mr. B., Shakespeare, whom you talk of so much, was the least abstract of poets, especially at his best. Dickens and Thackeray, less great, Jane Austen also, thrived on the specific. Of course, the latest, vague followers of Gertrude Stein have exceeded them. They are more elegant, more intelligent.

Poets and artists know from practice (practice helps theory, Mr. B., it really does) that art can't exist without the image, the line,



the word. Poetry particularly needs very specific images. If abstractions work, as Robert Creeley's do, they work only because they suggest the specific.

Bronowski might, given his principles, admire the most abstract and spiritless poem to be found in an avant garde magazine.

Why? Because he misses the prime thing in art (and literature). It is experience. Experience is specific. It is formed experience, not any old kind. And it lasts. People still are able to relive it after the artist and his conditions are dead. The great Augustan poet, Alexander Pope, filled his poems with the names of his contemporaries. Even with the finest set of notes from the most authoritative edition, I'll never know as much about these people as the silliest apprentice in Curll's print shop. But I can still love the poetry of Pope because he speaks to me in a human voice, fills my brain with his elegance, his vulnerability, his dry wit. The great, anonymous sculptor of Kuan Yin followed traditional forms, was not interested in real faces, but in faces seen in dreams and visions. But I can still love that humble sculptor, even if Bronowski doesn't know his name, because one of his figures speaks to me with human tongue. Neither of these men was an innovator, but both learned to speak to people miles away and cultures away and centuries away. It's a hard language, as hard as quantum mechanics.

Mr. Bronowski, stop theorizing. At least about art. Go back to the beginnings, that garden where you sit alone and watch *the real*. Then go back to the painting, the poem, the sculpture. Use all your senses. You have a good impulse when you say all creativity is personal. But you define personal too narrowly. Be contemplative for a change. Stop administering your lab. Stop sorting people into tidy, little bundles. Curb your "active nature." Follow the birds and small saints into the first world, where the real figures, "dignified, invisible,/ Mov(e) without pressure, over the dead leaves."<sup>2</sup>

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2. T. S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton".

# The Uncontrollable Mystery

*Herbert Blau relates the Bronowski article  
to his experience in the theater.*

*What follows is an interview by mail.*

AR: *Does Bronowski's definition of creativity ("a man becomes creative . . . when he finds a new unity in the variety of nature") match your own definition?*

BLAU: Back in the days of horse-and-buggy chemistry (when I was getting a degree in Chemical engineering), the new gospel was organic. Grace was abounding in the benzene ring. I am pretty much out of it, but from occasional forays into *Scientific American* and from overheard conversations among those who know, I gather the hottest research in chemistry is inorganic. The line between the two remains the mystery that it was. I am guessing at that, but I'm tempted to swear by it. An unscientific inclination. There was a similar inclination—I don't know if it was scientific—those years ago when I stared day after day at the Mendeleyev Table in the lecture hall. The periods of the elements, arranged by atomic number, gaped on vacancy. There were all those empty boxes after number 92. What was there? I knew there was something there, it was going to be awful when they found out what. I asked the professor. He said they were indeterminate. They later turned out to be radioactive. When the chemical engineers in the Manhattan Project later helped the Air Force to destroy Hiroshima, my worst premonitions were confirmed. Woe is me, I had

a gift: a negative capability, the imagination of disaster.

Was that creative? I'm not entirely sure. I suppose it might have been if I'd written a poem about it, but Yeats had anticipated me when he saw "the uncontrollable mystery on the bestial floor." The greatest artists *are* prophetic. The same is true of the greatest scientists. There is a sort of prophecy in a wild surmise or a fertile hypothesis. They not only know where it's at, but determine the way it's likely to go. It's where the guessing game is ripest that the artist and the scientist come together. The guessing is not all brain spinning around a vacuum but anchored to what's there. The creative occurs, for me, when the known reaches into the unknown with a grasp of consequence—as when King Lear stares down the sockets of Gloucester's eyes and sees *feelingly*.

AR: *Then, is the actor or director naturally creative?*

BLAU: I don't think much about nature, its unity or variety, except in this sense. I use the phrase "human nature" more than I should, because it's too erratic, whatever it is, and the best one can do is throw some portion of experience momentarily into focus. Unity is a threshold, no more, a watershed moment, epiphanic. It is all so provisional. But then that's a view that might arise from the nature of the theater, in the reality of which I pass my time. Theater is the art of passing time, severely mortal. The actor is the most vulnerable of artists because he is his own instrument, the medium of his technique; also because he is fastened to a dying animal. So is the scientist, but except for certain specialists, he doesn't make a profession of dying. As for the director, my profession, he is like the Ghost of *Hamlet*, all hypothesis subject to the ruin of change. He disappears into the dark saying, "List, list, oh, list! . . . Remember me." His creativity is realized in a final absence. He depends on a memory trace, a last prayer.

AR: *How would you relate science and the theater?*

BLAU: I know that in the subatomic world of mesons and anti-protons the scientist is also party to a disappearing act. He is

dealing more frequently with actualities, but with probabilities and symbolic forms. The measurements are increasingly indirect, depending on intuition, an approach to exactness but not quite that. Galileo could see the rings around Saturn through his telescope, but we are now trafficking with the invisible. Beyond that, I can't really say. I'm out of my realm. I suspect we're talking altogether different languages. I hear in fact that certain scientists and mathematicians don't even talk each other's languages. In the practical sense—in the world we think we can see, where reality looks as if it might be measured, or at least set in perspective—I think the differences, except for exceptional people in each area, are real differences. There is something about scientific method that is injured when you see feelingly, as it takes a certain impassivity to be a good surgeon. There are occupational hazards, a typology of the professions that tells a real story. Art, too, may be impassive as a Buddha or as cruel as an Aztec rite, but it does depend on entering like a succubus the condition of the Other. The presence of that Other—not an indeterminate nature, organic or inorganic, but a real mortal—is for me the critical thing. You may be cruel, but art is sacramental. (No sooner saying it, I remember Aesculapius.) The suffering is mutually endured, as the artist *becomes* his subject. The sort of genius Bronowski describes transfixes the devastating flux of things either with a clairvoyance we'll never understand or with a persistence unendurable to the average mind—the slow methodical accumulation of data and perception perhaps generated by an intuition on a blackboard and advanced to the state of theory like an obsession. Art, too, is long and the craft so hard to learn. There are forms of art that are more or less impersonal, but in art depersonalization is a metaphor. The removal is of another kind, like Proust's equally slow accumulation of data and perception in a room sealed like a chemical retort, through which he lived his life. I have the impression that while men live through science, the action is finally of another kind. (Tolstoy stopped writing novels for theological and philosophical tracts when he felt the world deranged; Einstein had to do his civil liberties on the side.) But, finally, I'm guessing.



AR: *Does participation in dramatic activities in a school setting encourage creativity in students?*

BLAU: I don't like the word creative, not because it isn't useful, but because I can't define it. There have been creative civilizations—or at least civilizations that give more powerful testimony to collective imagination than others. Recently, we have rediscovered the idea that group process may be creative. (I am not talking about Gestalt encounter sessions but of the collective work done by various theater groups.) The experience of theater—drama is another matter, a special case of the theater mentality—is a collective experience of the personal experience of mortality. It has always been that way. You can't disguise it even in the most mechanical or commercial of plays. The actor can forget his lines, a cue may be missed, the scenery can fall, the actor can die right there in front of your eyes. In the archaic background of that actor is the sacrificial animal in the center of the benzine ring. Wounded. Yet he is not what he seems to be. He is other than we know—think of Oedipus, that club foot. Or Iago: "Seeming, seeming." That's what the theater is about. A theater is spineless if it is without sexual energy, Grace abounding, there is a life bleeding out. What is there is not there. The theater's subject is time and it is subject to time. Drama comes on stage when time's passage is seen in the image of conflict and crisis; at the sticking point, the struggle for existence which is cribbed, cabined, confined, or raged against.

Does that experience suggest the existence of creativity for the participant or spectator? I should imagine so. The theater, by nature, demands that you see feelingly—though it may be a tale told by an idiot signifying nothing. Still, it is a very practical art (or productive, as Aristotle says). It requires that something be done, even if that something is nothing, as in the opening of *Waiting for Godot*. The creative is, all else aside, an *activity* of the mind, body, and psyche; synchronous. The theater specializes in such activity. It isn't there if it isn't done, even in closet drama, the pure activity of theatricalized mind. I happen to like that. I think it's creative. A theater in the brain may be superior to most

of what we see on stage, which is why some creative people prefer not to see plays, since they can never be realized as they are imagined. At this juncture, the theatrical imagination and the philosophical or scientific may merge again. But for all practical purposes, even the most complex, theater requires its pageant before it fades, leaving not a wrack behind.

Specifically what happens to students in a school always depends on what school, who's there, and how they conceive what they're doing. I don't believe the presence of anything is an automatic virtue. I've never believed that the presence of a large number of theaters around the country, or large audiences, is a necessary improvement in culture. Given what some theaters do, and what large audiences require (think TV), I can just as well do without them. While I can't speak for the culture, my guess is there might be some improvement if they didn't exist. But that's my bigotry and wish fulfillment. The experience of theater in a school can be as edifying as you dare to make it. If you don't make it something like what the theater tells you about itself (read those history books), when it is being most deep and most candid, then you are short-changing the students. Students, by the way, are only too ready to short-change themselves. They may be deluded about having experienced theater when they have experienced a shallow facsimile. The play is and is not the thing, depending on the character of the play, the attitudes in the doing, and the degree to which the doing represents, in the scientific sense, a genuine investigation.

What is creative in theater depends upon the art of the actor, who lives by exposure, *self*-exposure, not mere exhibitionism (some of that) but a showing forth of interior vision. There is something of a confession to it. The person leaks through the role. Theater becomes itself at the limit of revelation. What is there was not there before, suddenly exposed. There is no hiding then. I don't mean to make things needlessly difficult for those just beginning to understand it, but the theater lives most intensely at the point where you see what should almost not be seen—like the elements in those empty boxes of the periodic table, the uncontrollable mystery on the bestial floor.

AR: *Can we teach or train students through the theater to perceive in disorder a new unity?*

BLAU: Again, on the practical level, yes, what can one say? “Dramatic activities” are worth the doing and who knows what strange doors will open or what skeletons will come out of the closets. “Look again, look again, search everywhere,” the Furies say in the *Oresteia*, “you are going down forgotten, joy locked inside your heart.” The *Oresteia* is an awesomely civilized drama that seems in touch with the tribal roots. Look again. The second or third look may compound the fear or release the joy, one affecting the other, and the structure that causes the looking is valuable, dangerous, and creative. Look again, look again, one has to do that in the art of acting. If students are to perceive “in disorder a new unity,” they may be disappointed if they never find it, but they will surely never find it without the looking, which is rigorous, painstaking, often unendurable. Both art and science know that. And the strange pleasure of the process, which may be the only unity, that joy.

# ART

Every  
day, after  
lunch we colored  
sailboats and I got a  
headache looking at yellow.  
The sun stared at me from the end  
of my crayon; the boat burned off the  
page. One time I tried to turn a yellow  
boat blue so it would rise off the lake of white  
paper like a kite, but it turned green and became a  
tree.

When the teacher put a red X in the square, I decided  
to stick to yellow crayons and headaches.

MALCOLM GLASS

# Creativity in the Study of History

*Can history be taught as a perpetual research project?*

JOHN RATTE

I am a little worried about the word. Creativity is something my child has which is supposed to make up for defective skills in reading, writing, and counting; it is something which people are said to have when you have already said that they have everything else, and yet it is something which is so splendid that it seems to cast some doubt on the attributes which have preceded it: "not merely learned, but creative." Maybe we simply need more learning, and less creativity. If I am going to be comfortable with the word, then, I will have to define it as a combination of energy, or vigor, and inventiveness. I do this to exclude altogether any notion of creativity as implying original genius of the raw and disturbing kind usually admired in romantic poets and new rock stars, for whom the celebration of self and of the self's perceptions of the world are proper goals. Historians as writers and teachers may be performers, if they so choose, and if God has blessed them with talents appropriate to that ambition, but they cannot be performing *selves*, if I can appropriate that phrase; at least not to the exclusion of their task as conductors, conduits, communicators; orchestrators of discourse about things said and



done in the past; exploiters and exploders of myths, creators of new myths; teachers searching, with students, for new moral perspectives on the present and the future through the bizarre and mysterious work of taking seriously thoughts and actions forever lost.

Well, if they get to do all *that*, you may well say, they must be pretty creative. Possibly. If it means that they are energetic plotters of their enterprise. Good (creative) historians are terrific plotters: they scheme to get to archives, they scheme at ways of exploiting them, and, *pace* social science, for centuries they have schemed at hypothesis formation and model building in order to work out ways to force meaning out of the myriad kinds of evidence left by the predecessors on the earth. Otto Pflanze, Bismarck's biographer and a recent catechumen in the adventure of psychohistory, writes something about the use of psychoanalytic categories which aids my point. "The nature of psychoanalytic literature," he says,

offers some help for the historian, particularly for biographers. It abounds in models based on clinical experience and in broad generalizations about character types and typical psychic problems, which can be used to illuminate specific personalities. *Like suits, they can be tried on for size and shape and sometimes tailored to fit.*<sup>1</sup>

The passage I have italicized makes my point: historians will try anything that comes along, and some things that have not yet arrived, in their search for ways to "illuminate specific personalities" and specific problems in the past, ranging from demographic transformations, which can be illuminated by computer study of vast numbers of statistics previously beyond organization and hence use, to theological revolutions comprehensible to the historian only to the degree that he is willing to learn to think like a theologian.

The same kind of plotting is required for good history teaching. I see the need for creativity in three areas: in the design of what is to be learned, of a curriculum and of individual courses, in the execution of the scheme, and in the larger effort of creating an

atmosphere in which students can discover the importance of forging out of their learning and their other life experiences a moral perspective on themselves and their society. In this article I want to speak mainly about developments in the first of these areas, with some fragmentary personal reflections appended.

Creativity in the design of courses and curricula was the great concern of the last ten years. Of course individual teachers and departments and schools have always been concerned about offering students something other than a textbook, notes, recitation, and tests, but school budgets, the habits of publishers, and the technological problems involved in working up sources and other non-text materials blocked innovation and experiment. The post-Sputnik search for better schooling, which produced national curricula for physics and mathematics, hit history and the social sciences in 1962, when a whole series of curriculum development projects sprung up around the country, some financed by the federal government, some by private foundations, and many undertaken by large city school boards and some even sponsored by single schools. In 1963 the research coordinator of the Division of Educational Research in the Office of Education reported on the response to the Project Social Studies, which the Office of Education had sponsored under Congressional action in the previous year. At that time the Office of Education invited the colleges, universities, and state departments of education to submit proposals for two curriculum study centers. Six months later, government awards had been approved for seven curriculum centers, eleven research projects, and two other developmental programs.<sup>2</sup> Subsequently, some of these projects and other newer ones were designated as a system of regional curriculum research centers covering the country. In his 1967 report to secondary school principals on the new social studies, Professor Edwin Fenton of Carnegie, one of the pioneers in the field and himself an historian, was able to print the latest draft of a directory of social studies projects which listed forty-one different curriculum development efforts, of which about a dozen drew largely on historical materials, though only two or three were devoted entirely to historical

materials and concepts.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, during these years the men involved in these projects began to gain the attention of the professions. The national projects fostering the study of society through sociology and anthropology have been officially sponsored by the professional organizations in those fields. Now the American Historical Association, which had long sponsored pamphlets introducing special historical topics to high school teachers, has organized summer institutes to bring university scholars and high school teachers together. On several occasions the AHA heard from participants in the new social studies projects and attempted to assess their significance for the work of the academic historian. We can also note that publishers began to bring out some of these new curricula, though only very hesitantly: for since the new approach sets itself against the tradition of the textbook, the standard money-maker for the trade, publishers must now agree to produce a variety of material—books and booklets, slides, slide-tapes, and films—and these prove costly to make, as well as costly for most schools to buy.

But we are not worried about administrators or publishers. We need to look briefly at the theories generated by the ferment of creative thinking, about how history and social studies courses should be built, which marked the 1960s and moved one commentator to state that “Never have teachers enjoyed such a wealth of materials. . . . What does not exist and will never exist again is stereotyped uniformity of curriculum or of method.”<sup>4</sup> (We skip over the psychological theories which may undergird much of this work: Bruner’s *The Process of Education* and the work of Piaget most prominent in a large literature.) The concepts which the “new history” of the 1960s contributed to curriculum design are “inquiry” and “discovery learning,” words which have taken on a good deal of ideological freight: for their enthusiasts, pedagogical and even moral absolutes, for their critics, dangerous slogans which cover a retreat from hard learning and even from civic virtue. What did they mean?

The definition we find has a *negative* as well as a positive dimension. Advocates of discovery learning first point out the inade-

quacies of the traditional textbook approach to history. They argue that the textbook approach has meant that students, who cannot be regarded as naturally interested in history, are limited to learning a body of facts and generalizations—"the French revolution began in 1789 and was the outcome of the struggle of the new middle classes for political power," for example. Once the rewards for this factual learning are gained, presumably by getting a good grade in a test, there is no reason for the student to retain the information: more and more, there has been resistance to acquiring it in the first place. These critics also point out that the learned fact or generalization is of course arbitrary: it is one man's version of the past based on his reading of sources, monographs, or even simply other textbooks. Worse, it forecloses any original thought on the part of the student.

### *the inquiry/discovery method*

Thus Professor Edwin Fenton states that "in the past, teachers have often organized their courses of study around a list of generalizations which students learn. But generalizations tend to shut out inquiry. They tempt teachers to choose . . . from a long list of generalizations and to teach them as product."<sup>5</sup> In another paper, Fenton noted that the example for this kind of teaching comes from the higher levels. "Many college historians and social scientists still teach exclusively by lecture and depend heavily on texts and monographs. They are content-centered, paying only incidental attention to the mode of inquiry or to effective objectives . . . The college textbook-and-lecture elementary courses cannot provide satisfactory models of good teaching for future elementary and secondary school teachers."<sup>6</sup> The Committee on the Study of History (the "Amherst Project") stated that its work was based on theories of learning similar to those which inspired the changes in the teaching of natural sciences and mathematics, "and on the conviction that history is often inadequately taught because it is presented as a series of facts or answers that bear little apparent relation to the student's own concerns, and as a



result contribute little or nothing to the maturing of his intellectual powers or to his growth as a human being.”<sup>7</sup>

Dr. Richard Brown of the Amherst Project made several enlightening statements on the *positive* meaning of the inquiry or discovery method. He insisted that it is first and foremost a method, not of teaching, but of learning. “In its simplest form,” he wrote:

it rests on the hypothesis that the student learns best as an active inquirer—by asking questions and pursuing their answers—rather than when he is asked, as an end in itself, to master the answers of others to questions which may be quite irrelevant to him, or which he may only simply understand. In short, it rests on the hypothesis that the *method* by which the professional scholar learns may be useful as a model for learning at all levels—and useful as a model for what goes on, or might go on in the classroom.

According to Brown, the inquiry method does not mean that the student works only with source materials or that he “should spend all his time trying to recapitulate for himself all that scholars have found out before him and could tell him if he asked.” He will investigate both inductively and deductively, like the scholar, and

like the scholar he will doubtless use original evidence as the heart of his investigation; but also like the scholar he will read books in the pursuit of his question, and he will listen to people who can tell him something.

At the heart of the idea of inquiry or discovery learning is the suggestion that “education be seen from the point of view of how and what students learn, rather than from the point of view of what we teach them or how we teach it.”<sup>8</sup> In an address to the American Historical Association, Brown argued that all the projects, including his own, were committed to the idea that “students learn best what they discover for themselves, and that the most important thing for them to learn, through practice, is how to learn, in order that they may go on learning through life, long after today’s facts are outdated.”<sup>9</sup>

Discovery learning, then, means placing the student in touch with all the materials the professional historian uses, from primary sources to textbooks, seeing to it that he has some questions or

hypotheses with which to begin his study, and then encouraging him in the work of testing out those hypotheses, adducing new evidences, and moving towards some useful historical generalizations of his own. Let us consider a few examples of this approach. The Amherst Project has devoted itself entirely to historical materials, and hence its work has focused on developing curricular units on certain historical periods and problems. Characteristic is a unit which studies what happened on Lexington Green in April, 1775. The students ostensibly study an important moment in American history. "More fundamentally," according to Brown, the unit

introduces the student to the nature of the historian's craft—and more importantly than that, it invites him to confront the basic question of the nature of reality and the human problem of perception. The student is faced at the outset with the question of the reliability of eyewitness testimony. He reads in the first two sections a number of eyewitness accounts of what happened at Lexington—accounts very much at variance, of course, as to how many soldiers were there, who fired the first shot and why, and so on. He is then asked to write his own account of what happened; in effect he 'does' history. In following sections, he looks at what later people have said happened, and he is asked to account for these. He reads a number of accounts by historians, and discovers, if he is perceptive, that they vary to some extent according to whether the historian is an Englishman or an American, and to an even greater extent, according to the time period in which they were written. He also looks at a group of textbook generalizations as to 'what happened' and is asked to assess their validity. He then moves on in the final section to contrast the way the historian apprehends truth with the way both the artist and the scientist apprehend it—and ultimately to a consideration of what truth and reality are, ending up with Plato in the Cave.

And Brown gave a statement of the purpose of this approach to historical study through inquiry:

In these units . . . our hope is that the student, in trying to explain for himself why particular human beings acted as they did in particular situations, will deepen his own understanding of what it is to be human, that he will come to appreciate man's necessity to act in the

midst of uncertainty, to grapple with the moral dimension of man's behavior, and to comprehend more fully the nobility and frailty of the human condition.<sup>10</sup>

I have cited Dr. Brown's presentation of his work in some detail not only because the Amherst Project was the most exclusively historical of the several social studies curriculum development projects, but because he stated eloquently the focus on original sources and the concern with the effective goals of education common to many other endeavors. For instance, the "American Experiment" materials developed by the Educational Development Corporation are designed explicitly to sensitize students to "issues of great moment and passion."<sup>11</sup> And like the Amherst Project, the EDC program emphasized from the beginning that "as much as possible, original source materials . . . (are) to be used. Students would work independently to put documents and information together and arrive at conclusions of their own."<sup>12</sup> Professor Richard Douglas of the MIT Humanities Department described the new history as helping students to "see around the corners of their own interests and experiences" by learning about the lives of other men.<sup>13</sup> The Newton high school three-year sequence developed in part by Douglas began with a message to the students which told them that they themselves are historical creatures, and that the purpose of the study of history is not merely to give the student fresh facts about the past and the traditions to which they belong, but also to educate their attention and to enable them to see and hear the world they live in with an idea of its history.<sup>14</sup> The course started not with a study of ancient society or modern history, but with a close reading of several short stories in which writers have dramatized the experience of adolescents discovering that they are different from their fathers and that they are also the inheritors of the traditions of their society. Another experimental course developed at the Educational Development Center in Cambridge proposed to create an understanding of traditional societies by giving tenth grade students the raw materials of the society of a 17th century village. Students were to take on the identities of the village citizens, look up their family

histories in the parish register, learn the customs and superstitions of the day, discover what lands they hold from the map they are given of the country, argue out disputes over crops and marriage dowries.

Several other social studies projects took history as their base but have attempted to be more specific in defining exactly what *kind* of historical material that student should be given. For example, the Harvard School of Education has sponsored a social studies project, which "is based on the conviction that the analysis of public controversy should command the primary attention of social studies curriculum in public secondary schools." Professor Donald Oliver of Harvard argues that teaching methods of social science inquiry must take a back seat to training students "to examine and analyze, through discussion and argument, the kinds of disputes that give birth to social conflict." The goal here was not a familiarity with the way historians think, or a general sympathy with the human condition, or a recognition in the student of his own historicity, but rather gaining "certain powers of analysis that will aid (him) in discussing value dilemmas on which public controversy thrives."<sup>15</sup> Thus, the Harvard project curriculum cut across historical periods *and* the several social sciences, examining individual conflicts within small communities, the evolution of Anglo-American legal institutions, the impact of industrialization on conflicts, social and intersocietal conflicts in the 20th century societies like the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany, and China, and other more contemporary problems. Implicit in such a proposal was a major value decision, namely that if American students learn about conflict, they will be able to deal with conflict. And here a decision was made to deal throughout three years of high school with one basic theme, whereas the Carnegie, EDC, and Newton projects proposed to survey a variety of topics as well as conceptional approaches. (All the programs had in common a realistic approach to the present structure of coverage in high schools which generally offer world history, American history, and comparative twentieth century history in the three years preceding admission to the university.)



So far we have characterized the inquiry method, suggested its strong interest in the development of the student, and given some examples of the kinds of materials and problems which were developed. We must also note the universal interest both the new history and the new social science approach has shown in developing conceptual knowledge in the student. An excellent introductory statement on this problem was made by one of the directors of the Sociological Resources for Secondary Schools Project sponsored by the American Sociological Association. William Hering argues that even when students learn facts in an appropriate and relevant context, they still remain facts. A new context might render what has been learned "useless or even misleading." What makes for good learning is the meshing of new facts not with old facts, but with a conceptual framework. Good inductive learning takes place when "knowledge is conceptually received and meshed with the existing conceptual frame of reference of the student." What is important, of course, is that new facts, once received and meshed, may also alter the conceptual framework itself. Hering concludes that "significant learnings occur when newly acquired knowledge changes that framework, reorganizing it to accommodate the new data."<sup>16</sup>

### *a conceptual framework*

A concern with teaching basic social studies concepts complements the point of view taken by most curriculum developers that the lines between history and the social sciences must be broken down—as is in fact more and more the case in the academic disciplines themselves. Fenton argues that the structure of the various social sciences, and history as well, is in fact made up of its fundamental concepts, and without understanding these concepts little significant learning can take place. Fenton gives a good example of how familiarity with key concepts from one field can illuminate study in another. He suggests that the student who wants to study the social structure of Boston, Massachusetts in the mid-eighteenth century might bring to his study the sociological concepts of social

class, role, status, and norms.

As he reads diaries, autobiographies, newspaper accounts and similar source materials, the student's knowledge of social class, status, role, and norms will help to guide his search for data. He will ask himself how many social classes existed in the society. He will try to learn the relative position on the social scale which each occupational, racial, and religious group occupied. He will examine the roles of groups and individuals in society to determine, for example, whether housewives in seventeenth century New England had the same roles as housewives in our own world.<sup>17</sup>

Another scholar who has taken an even more comprehensive view of the possibility of conceptual learning argued that much of what children now learn in history and geography courses is absolutely useless. Lawrence Senesh suggests that children should begin to learn the fundamental concepts of the social sciences in the first grade, discovering each year more of their complexity and power by applying them to more and more complicated material. "Primary school children," he writes

"study Indians and the colonial period, but since they do not possess the fundamentals of economics, political science, sociology, and anthropology, their learning is trivial. It would make more sense if geography and history were culminating courses in high school. In the intervening years, the children could have learned the fundamental ideas of the various social sciences, thereby enriching the geography and history courses."<sup>18</sup>

This survey would be misleading if I did not point out that there has been a good deal of criticism of the fundamental proposition of the new history and the new social science. That proposition, simply stated, is that the method by which the scholar learns *within* his discipline is the proper model of the student's learning *of* the discipline. Of course some enthusiasts of the inductive or discovery methods would reject that definition and insist that they were interested in seeing that the child learns how to think creatively in general, and not in the specific way of a given academic subject. Still, most of the projects begin by doing a subject, and this means that their conceptual learning must be anchored

to one or more disciplines at least for part of the learning time. One criticism of this approach is important because it is based on an attempt to study what actually happens in a classroom when students learn history in the new way, and because it was presented to the American Historical Association, and hence attempted to communicate the point of view of the professional educationist to the professional historian.

### *can questions be original?*

Professor Arthur Bolster of Harvard made a study of three “new history” projects as they were being taught, making videotapes of classes and conducting interviews with teachers and students, and analyzing the published rationales of the programs—including two we have discussed today, the Amherst and the Educational Development Center projects. Bolster discovered that in spite of their professed interest in having the student ask questions about the material, “none of the three programs is structured to encourage learners to generate their own questions, nor in any of the classes I observed did anyone do so.” In other words, the choice of materials for the course has come from the questions the curriculum writers have deemed significant. Hence it is “highly unlikely that the student will be aware of issues other than those the materials are designed to raise.” Bolster questioned Dr. Brown’s expectations that the new history will produce “open-ended questions” and wonders if the students will not always be led to the conclusions of the scholars which have been set out as the goal in the teacher’s manual which invariably accompanies the new history and new social science courses. Noting that the new history programs seek to teach their students “that history speaks to universals in the human conditions and consequently is relevant because it is useful in clarifying their own lives and times,” Bolster reports that students found it very difficult to make the connections across historical time, “to see the relevance of the historical situation under consideration.” A student was asked, on the basis of his study of religious opinion and rights in the eighteenth

century, what position he would take if the government tried to deprive him of his property rights because of his religious beliefs. His answer:

How do I know what I'd do if I were deprived of property on account of my religion. I couldn't tell you because I've never experienced it. All I know is Brookline and the surrounding areas.

Bolster noted as a "trend" in all the classes he visited that "students, even in the high school years, do not find it easy to imagine themselves as part of history." A further problem was the difficulty the students found in mastering the "contingent, relativistic approach to knowledge" implied by the programs. In summarizing the results of a discussion devoted to defining the characteristics of an American in 1968, he reported that "with the exception of a few eleventh graders, all students took refuge in derivations of the 'each man's entitled to his own opinion' position when confronted with ambivalence in interpretation." Younger students were reluctant to "accept the full implications of contingent thought," but older students were better able to handle questions with such implications. An eleventh grader, when asked what kind of government he felt was best, answered:

That's an awful question to ask. You know I'm going to say democracy. If I were a Russian kid I'd say communism . . . but in any case, I'd say you need a government where there are separate levels of power which can balance things out—for example, providing an executive veto. That way you have some chance to eliminate possible errors in decision.

After noting that many of the students expressed a preference for the textbook ("it's easier, though perhaps not quite so interesting") Prof. Bolster concluded that:

Whatever their deficiencies, the new courses are noticeably superior to traditional didactic narrative courses. The materials and the classroom dialogues that are designed to stimulate are unquestionably more intellectually sophisticated and visibly more exciting than the textbook recitations to which so many students are still subjected.<sup>19</sup>

And Bolster cites some studies of college freshmen which suggest



that the inquiry courses promote intellectual flexibility.

I would argue that the possibilities for inventiveness and energy in curriculum development and the design of individual courses are much greater thanks to the activities of the 1960s, which tended to fade as government money was withdrawn from educational experiment. The task, however, must be that of the individual and the small group, with or without elaborate materials and conceptual schemes worked up by university consultants and professional educators. Creative teaching is difficult, if not impossible, unless the teacher has internalized the ideas and readings and questions he wants to present to his students. An elaborate course designed by geniuses and packaged in films and maps and masques is no better *for the teacher* than the most authoritarian text unless it has been thought through and somehow “affirmed” before it is used. (The National Humanities Faculty has helped a number of teachers to get around this problem by bringing scholars—hopefully “creative” ones—to schools where people from history, the arts, English, and other subjects have committed themselves to the development of a humanities course or curriculum.)

Energy and inventiveness in the classroom depend on the preparation that goes on before students and teacher come together. Students are entitled to know where they are going, what is to be learned, why it “hangs together” in the teacher’s mind, what use it may be. The enterprise must be structured. The re-creation of the past through discussion stimulated by evidences of that past and by statements by other discussants, the authors of history books: that is the goal. All the magic—and the science—lies in the talk. Ray Bradbury tells a touching tale of the rationalization of human culture. As the censors of a soulless brave new world destroy one by one the works in whose pages live the great creations of poets seeking the mysterious and the unknown, the living phantoms of Poe and Dickens fade into nothingness on the dark surface of another planet. Plato, Napoleon, Ashoka, the medieval peasant, the factory workers of nineteenth-century Manchester, slaves in Georgia, soldiers in Vietnam: all quite dead. But they find a different sort of life as we speak of them, just as the inven-

tions of the novelist live in some sense in the reader's mind. Once brought to this special kind of life, people of the past affect our lives, however slightly, just as do the lives of other persons with whom we have discourse. Learning history and living everyday life reinforce each other, regardless of which one chooses as one's starting point. Some people can't make much sense out of the present and find the past more real. Most of us, even if we can't understand the present, find it dictating the concerns which we bring to the past. Geoffrey Barraclough argues that "contemporary history begins when the problems which are actual in the world today first take visible shape."<sup>20</sup> This does not mean that everything in the past which does not connect with the obvious domestic and international issues of the moment is of merely antiquarian interest. What Professor Barraclough says clearly applies to the problem of American imperialism, and the good teacher will search as far back as is necessary to find its beginnings. But it also applies to the problem of imperialism in general, which will take us as profitably to Athens as to the Spanish-American war; and to the problem of love, and the problem of justice.

### *the past and present together*

But once a present concern has sent us searching for origins and roots and parallels, we should see to it that we and our students are able to let go of our arguments and ready to take hold of the intrinsic plausibility and the human *completeness* of the past moment we have set out to plunder. The past is a thing in itself, as well as a point of departure for our present. Once the pattern of visiting back and forth between past and present is set up in classroom discussion, the independence, as well as the interdependence, of the two terms begins to emerge. I want to know about America in Vietnam: I go back to the French in Indo-china. I want to know about the irrationality of the counter-culture and I go back to the ferment of the 1890s. Once I have gotten back there—the image must owe something to H. G. Wells and his

time machine—I must suspend the present-mindedness which initiated the effort, for there may be better things to be learned from the finished moment than the ones we set out to master. Pushing the idea further, we may find new ways of approaching our present and our future from the strictest observance of the “uselessness” of the past.

I have left the matter of creativity in design and seem to be wandering in a somewhat allusive fashion towards the matter of creativity in execution. Talk with oneself and/or with one's colleagues creates better courses, and talk in the classroom creates a living past. Creativity is not witnessed by the dominance of one person in either circumstance. Students must talk, teachers must ask questions. Discourse must always be about things read in common, books and papers must be in the classroom, ready to be dissected and analyzed in all their parts. The shell game is a noble thing and no teacher of any subject, especially history and social studies, could long survive without it, but there must be a reasonable expectation on the part of the student that the answer he is expected to give, or approximate, lies in embryo within the materials read and that he does not have to think spontaneously a thought hitherto limited in its existence to the mind of the instructor. The function of the teacher's learning is to assist in the birth of countless small epiphanies in the minds of his students, not to offer a completed revelation out of his own.

Design and execution are carried out within a cultural context. The ideas of Messieurs Fenton, Brown, *et al.* converge on the concern for the learning capacities of the individual student, not because the 1960s was the decade of discovery learning and/or Piaget, but because Americans define the meaning of life in terms of the experiences and hopes of the individual. The pieties of American official ideology aside, we do not live in *a* culture, but in several, or it sometimes seems, in none. History teaching is crucial to our society and is fought over by school boards and book burners because it is a mode of acculturation into a set of moral perspectives which in many cases have no real living connection with the lives of those being accultured. The experience of

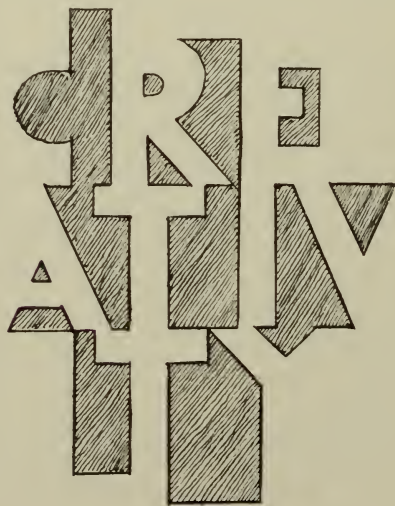


black Americans reading white American textbooks is only the most obvious of many. When we want to be creative, we rush to the individual, the individual case, the individual person, because we are thus freed from the responsibility of making larger, more general statements to embrace what we know to be disparate data and dissenting groups. The other side of the coin of discovery learning and individualized instruction in all areas of the school and the college is the admission that we cannot find common themes and common subjects through which to train our minds and learn about each other at the same time. In our search for creativity in history—and in English and religion and art—we set ourselves and our students to learning more about less, and never the same less for any two people. Graduate researchers at ten, our children do twenty-page papers, each on a different topic, and never talk to each other. We want community but we don't know how to get it. Community has been a characteristic of past societies; a classroom in pursuit of common goals can be a paradigm of other social forms. We should not ask ourselves to choose between two extremes: on the one hand, the teacher as martinet, lecturing and drilling textbook knowledge to a group of students who quickly learn that there is but one right answer to the question; and on the other, a class full of term-paper writers encouraged either to see history as a perpetual individual research project or as an arsenal for contemporary ideological battles. There is no rejecting *some* form of learning by inquiry, just as there is no escaping from the fact that the teacher knows more and will, from time to time, talk more, than his students. But the creative teaching and learning we want will only come from carefully planned courses which take a confident proprietary view of human cultures, taught by men and women who share the belief that nothing human can be foreign to them or their students, and carried on through continuing discourse which lends life to the people and problems of past societies, not just because we can find in them the origins of our present dilemmas, but because we know that we develop our own capacity for life by recognizing life and marveling at its dignity whenever we find it.



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2. Gerald R. Smith, "Project Social Studies—A Report," *Social Education* (November, 1963) p. 357.
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8. Richard H. Brown, "Discovery Learning and Innovation in the Schools," address at the 47th Annual Meeting of the National Council for Social Studies, November, 1967, mimeo, pp. 1-2.
9. Richard H. Brown, "The Historian and New Approaches to History in the Schools," a paper given at the 82nd Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association, December, 1967, mimeo, p. 2.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.
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12. Educational Services Incorporated (now Education Development Center) "A Short History of the Social Curriculum Project," mimeo, January, 1967, p. 6. The authors also wrote that in their materials "the textbookish, question and memorized-answer approach would be abandoned; substituted for it would be an attempt to engage children in the real problems of human society and its history." *Ibid.*, p. 2.
13. Richard M. Douglas, "Science and Humanities," *The Science Teacher*, May, 1965, pp. 19-20.
14. Richard M. Douglas, "A New Approach to History," *Patterns of Learning in the Public Schools of Newton*, January, 1966, (Volume 5, No. 3) p. 1.
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  17. Fenton, "The New Social Studies," pp. 65-66.
  18. Lawrence Senesh, "Organizing a curriculum around social science concepts" in Irving Morrisett (ed.) *Concepts and Structure in the New Social Science Curricula* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Social Science Education Consortium, 1966), pp. 22-23.
  19. Arthur S. Bolster, "The Student as Learner: Some Reflections on the New History Curricula," a paper read at the 83rd Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association, 1968, mimeo, pp. 14, 17.
  20. Geoffrey Barraclough, *An Introduction to Contemporary History* (London, 1964), p. 12.



## A CRY OF FATHERS

(for Geoffrey)

O my son, I remember the summer of butterflies,  
How you ran after their rainbows, their skies  
Of wings over the clover, the hay savor  
Of sun on your red lips, the air's taste the flavor  
Of timothy and briar: you and the long pole  
And the white net running to capture the sail.

Now, now, in your charge at the beasts,  
When you hear in your blood the unicorns trample  
And point, when you snarl at the lion who feasts  
On your sex, or with your fists smash down  
The cages of sham: Can you, can you see  
The tumbling butterflies—the flutter, the hover, the stay?

O my son, remember, remember. Here is the love  
I cannot give. I am the beast your father,  
I am the cage your mother. But O, remember, remember  
How they came by that day in the white sun  
Like ribbons waving, like yellow handkerchiefs lazy  
And flowing, like kings and queens in sailing ships  
On a green-gold sea, all waving, and the long pole  
And the netting over your head, and your quick feet  
Quickly running, running, running after—O after.

ARNOLD KENSETH

# Why Not Learn to Write English?

*A frank display of opinion*

WARREN J. MYERS

Let me start with a frank display of opinion: I doubt that education has much to do with “creativity” if that word means “creative power or faculty; ability to create,” which is, by the way, the unique definition of the *OED*.

Where the ability to create comes from, I do not know, although I think I can recognize it when I see it. I do not doubt that schooling can assist this ability on its way. I am certain that frequently what is done in school sometimes stands in its way, but I suspect that even adversity has its uses for the true creator.

If we wish information about “creativity,” presumably we ought to go to those who “create,” and appropriate to the theme of “creativity and education,” I offer the following letter of E. E. Cumings, written in 1953, while he was Norton Professor at Harvard:



6 Wyman Road  
Cambridge 38, Mass.  
February 19 '53

Dear Mr \_\_\_\_\_

thanks for the letter of February 14. It was an astonishing valentine! Being neither a scholar nor a critic, I don't read manuscripts or give advice. But in your case let me make a suggestion

why not learn to write English? It's one of the more beautiful languages. And (like any language) it has a grammar, syntax, etc: which can be learned. Nobody can teach you to write poetry, but only you can learn the language through which you hope to become a poet

trying to write poetry before you've learned all there is to learn about writing is like tackling the integral calculus without understanding arithmetic. It's even more like trying to build yourself a house from the ridgepole down; instead of laying the foundations first & then erecting a structure on them, story by story

there must be someone at your college who teaches English Composition. If you take this letter to him, he'll be glad (I'm sure) to help you

\* \* \*

Although I am skeptical about teaching "creativity" in schools and colleges, I have no doubt at all that we can teach languages, English and others, in these institutions. I say that we can teach them, not that we are teaching them well.

My experience with the majority of eighth and ninth grade students entering Groton from so-called grammar schools is that the grammar of English or any other language is seldom, if ever, mentioned in these schools. As a classicist, let me hasten to say that by the study of grammar, I do not mean the imposition of rules appropriate to Latin onto English, but rather the analytic

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study of how words in English, or any other language, express meaning. It is true that for some centuries Latin, as the puberty rite of the Western World, was used for this purpose, but this is now a question of only historical interest. That another "creator," Evelyn Waugh, maintained that his study of Latin taught him how to compose an English sentence is, perhaps, as an example of the uses of adversity I mentioned above.

This academic year, as a visiting lecturer at Amherst College, I have met an undergraduate who had never heard of the parts of speech. It hardly surprised me that it was the same young man who was in extreme difficulty in composing a simple paragraph for a course paper. His problem is not faulty intelligence, for he is bright enough. His problem is that he has been cheated in school, because his teachers have not taught him even the elements of this particular subject. I grant that this is an extreme example, but I fear that it is not unusual for college students to be inadequately trained in their own language. Recently colleagues in both history and political science have told me that their students are markedly less well trained in English composition than they were five and ten years ago.

For those who are skeptical of my admittedly limited experience and who prefer a statistical demonstration of the failure of elementary and secondary schools to teach English well, there is the publication of the consistently steady decline in the verbal scores of the SSAT, published in *The New York Times* of December 16, 1973. I ought to add that the mathematical scores have been falling steadily too.

That this weakness in elementary and secondary verbal training has serious implications both for individuals and for society is obvious, especially to anyone who has read George Orwell's essay, "Politics and the English Language." Under his heading of "pretentious diction," we can add *defoliation* (more than leaves were harmed); *pacification* ("they make a desert and call it peace,"—Tacitus); *credible* (not is it true, but will "they" believe it?), and 1973's classic contribution, *inoperative*. To paraphrase Dr. Johnson, the man who does not take care of his language is little likely to take care of anything else.

# A Glance with the Eye...

*Richmond schools invited practicing  
poets to talk with students. A partial  
transcription of one encounter follows.*

MICHAEL MOTT

*What is poetry?*

Too many people feel, or have been led to feel, about poetry the way the French nobleman Saint-Simon felt about the king's new palace at Versailles: "one admires and flees." Instead of admiring—and perhaps running from—poems that do not seem to be speaking to you, start by finding some poems that do speak to you. You don't have to like all poetry to like some poems.

Poetry is hard to define. My definition might not please you. Yours might not please me. We might have as many definitions of poetry as there are people in this room. Here is a story that may help us. A friend of mine who was teaching a second grade class asked everyone to write his or her definition of poetry. One boy at the back of the room had not heard the assignment correctly. He wrote, "It's made of clay but holds water."

That works for pottery. Does it work for poetry? By metaphor,

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This exchange is printed with the permission of the Richmond Intercultural Center for the Humanities.

yes, rather well. Let's make the comparison. Clay is common, "common as dirt." Words are common. (How many words have I used since I came in? How many words do you hear, speak, in a day?) Clay is shaped in the potter's hand. The clay becomes his shape. Words are shaped by the poet. The common stuff of language becomes his shape alone. The pot will hold water, something which is common, but magically elusive also. The poem will hold thought, something which is common, but magically elusive too. But if the pot and the poem are to last and to go on holding what they hold, they must be refined. The pot is fired, baked at great heat in a kiln. The poem is worked and reworked by the poet until it is strong, durable.

Poetry is made of the common material of language, shaped to his shape by the poet to hold his thought in the best possible way for the longest possible time.

Just as the potter enjoys making his pot, the poet enjoys making his poem. Poetry begins with a sort of game with words. Even when we are writing a serious, or a sad poem, we enjoy what we are doing with language.

### *Should I like all kinds of Poetry?*

There is poetry for every mood: happy poems, angry poems, sad poems, and poems for that special mood in which we are sad, but want to be left alone almost to enjoy our sadness. There are love poems, mean-minded poems. Match your mood to the mood of the poem, seek out poems that talk to you in the mood you are in. Whatever your mood, write your poem in that mood.

Share and swap poems among yourselves. Don't always expect that the poem you like will match the mood of the other person. They may well come back to your poem, or the poem you have found for them, when their present mood changes.

### *How do we find our own voices in our poems?*

In writing your poems, the one thing to remember is simply to make them *yours*. Your poems should be news from you. Only



you see the world through your eyes. Only you think the thoughts in your head. Whitman said: "A glance with the eye confounds the learning of centuries." He meant to see and feel the world through his own senses and his own responses. He meant to give his news in his own words. In this extract from *Song of Myself* you can hear Whitman's voice very clearly. It is not quite the same as any other poet's voice (Is your voice quite the same as anyone else's voice?) His news comes in a series of questions. "Why hasn't anyone asked quite these questions before" he seems to be asking. He tries to answer in his own way. We can enjoy this, agreeing or disagreeing with Whitman. His news may be an ending for him, but it is a beginning for us. Every good poem of this kind awakens our senses and starts our thoughts. This is Whitman's reply to the child's question, "What is grass?" But what would our answer be, our news?

A child said *What is the grass?* fetching it  
to me with full hands;  
How could I answer the child? I do not  
know what it is any more than he.  
I guess it must be the flag of my disposition,  
out of hopeful green stuff woven.  
Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the  
Lord,  
A scented gift and remembrancer design-  
edly dropt,  
Bearing the owner's name someway in the  
corners, that we may see and remark, and  
say *Whose?*  
Or I guess the grass is itself a child, the  
produced babe of the vegetation.  
Or I guess it is a uniform hieroglyphic,  
And it means, Sprouting alike in broad  
zones and narrow zones,  
Growing among black folks as among white,  
Kanuck, Tuckahoe, Congressman, Cuff, I

give them the same, I receive them the  
same.

And now it seems to me the beautiful uncut  
hair of graves.

WALT WHITMAN

Unless we can train our observations, something will be missing in our poems. But we have four senses, besides seeing. All are important. We like a poet who reminds us of sight, touch, smell, taste, sound—as Whitman does. His poems make us feel more alive. Shouldn't we remember this when we write our own poems?

We need the same precision we use for observation in talking about emotions. This is sometimes difficult. All of us are likely to overdo it, or to undo it, when we are talking about how we feel. The best rule of thumb I can suggest is this: Don't pretend to emotions you don't have. Don't be afraid of expressing emotions you do have.

Poetry begins with a game of words. We need to stretch and develop our sense of language. Even the exercises can be enjoyable:

Take a very ordinary word and put it in a sentence in such a way that makes the reader see the word in a new, more thought-provoking manner.

Make a list of ten unusable words and then try to use all ten in a poem.

Write a poem that gives a sense of color without mentioning the name of any colors.

Write a very noisy poem, then a very quiet poem, etc.

*What about rhyme?*

Rhyme has certain advantages, and certain disadvantages. Among other things, a rhymed poem is easier to remember; and rhyme, with strict form and meter, gives a certain authority, inevitableness, to what you are saying. If you want this, use rhyme, strict

form, and meter. If you don't, they will work against your intention. Your poem will seem too heavy, and the rhyme will seem too bullying, or intruding, to this reader. On the whole avoid writing poems that seem to have been written for the rhyme. A jingle that uses cat, hat, rat, and mat is probably going to be obvious and dull, even on first hearing. A poem that uses June-moon, arms-charms, love-above etc., won't continue to please even the writer for very long.

Use form to fit the subject. One thing you might like to think about is this: If you feel overwhelmed with your emotions, you have two choices in writing about them. You can show that you feel frustrated, trapped, held in, by using a strict form. Or you can write your emotions off, release them on paper, as you would like to release them in fact. Strangely enough, the strict form here is much more likely to give a true picture of how you feel, and is much more likely to produce a successful poem. It is certain to convey the power of your feelings. Power is felt more strongly in a battle with constraining forces. Power released from constraint almost always dissipates itself too quickly to remain power. Think of a great river held in by walls of stone or cement. Then think of that river released into a plain or a desert. When you are quietly and seriously looking for some truth, or responding to some observation of your own, free verse is better in most cases. The most important thing is to make your poem yours. If the search for a rhyme-word is making you lose your concentration on what was your main purpose in writing the poem, forget about trying to make the poem rhyme.

*How do you know what language to use in your poems?*

Getting language right—that is the obsession of the writer who has patience and a mania for precision. Yeats, the great Anglo-Irish poet, was an old man when he said something like this, “It was a long time before I discovered the language of my poetry.” At a greater age than eighty, John Crowe Ransom is still discovering and making the language of his poetry—finding ways of making the words work the way he wants them to work in a

particular line. It's very simple in a way; but word-craft is the joy and madness of poets.

I've just started to do it my self, so it's a good point to give a warning. Try to avoid what I call "News from Mt. Sinai," making some great general statement for all mankind from the top of that mountain . . . "All people are" . . .

Getting what you think (feel, see etc.) right is usually hard enough. These great "over-views" are likely to be a disaster, whether you are young or middle-aged, or old. If you want to make such a statement, be sure you can prove it. Better, show us, and make us come out with the statement.

On the whole, nobody likes to be bullied into an attitude. There's all the difference in the world between saying to someone: "It's a pity you missed that sunset last night. It was beautiful," and saying, "It's a pity you missed that sunset last night" . . . then going on to describe the sunset in such a way that it's your friend who says: "It must have been beautiful. I wish I had seen it"—when you finish.

Make your own poems *yours*. Ezra Pound made "Make it new" almost a motto for poets. But if you "make it yours," it's bound to be new also. Only you can see through your eyes. Only you can think inside your head.

While you are trying to find ways of making what you see, and feel, and think clear, precise, and in the language of your own poetry, listen to how other people use words, and compare. Read, yes, but perhaps more important, *eavesdrop*. Ask yourself questions while you are doing so. "How well did he describe that? Can I see how it happened, or is it all a blur? Is she actually giving a message, or is she pretending to say one thing, and actually saying another?"

### *How do the words work? Could they work better?*

One of the hardest jobs for all of us is to be precise about our emotions, what we feel. We can go from one extreme to the other, and never get it right. Sentimental one minute, "tough," the next.



This will help only a little, but try this basic rule: Don't pretend to feelings you don't have, and don't be afraid of expressing those you do have.

Boris Pasternak's novel, *Dr. Zhivago*, is a great novel for a great many reasons; but for someone who wants to write, it shows how a poet creates himself before he creates the poems. It shows too, as no other book I know does, how the poet "discovers the language of his poetry," and even the images of his poetry.

*What are the subjects for poetry?*

There are so many likely subjects, I want to concentrate on less likely subjects. Even platitudes and clichés can be made subjects. Try "surprising" a different meaning out of them. When I was trying to think of a title for my first book of poems, I kept running into the phrase "the cost of living." I thought, why should that phrase only mean economics—dollars, pounds, francs, and so on—What does it mean "The *Cost of Living*"? The more I thought about it, the better I thought it was for the title of a book of serious, rather questioning poems. Signs and slogans give good subjects for poetry. Don't just accept the reading the sign-writer and slogan-maker want you to accept; think round and round what the sign, or slogan actually means: "Don't Miss Any Memories!" . . . "Squeeze Into Middle Lane," etc.

You might do what I did one day: try an alphabet. Start with A and just go through to Z, writing a poem on the first thing you think of that begins with the letter you are on.

From A PERSONAL ALPHABET

B

Making an almost invisible sap  
of many things worth keeping  
upon earth

creators also  
of the most perfect shape  
for building

masters of order  
and economy  
though what human being  
would want a place  
in their ideal cities

or to taste too often  
the oppressive sweetness  
of their product?

Yet, grown indolent  
in summertime of thyme,  
of lavender and clover

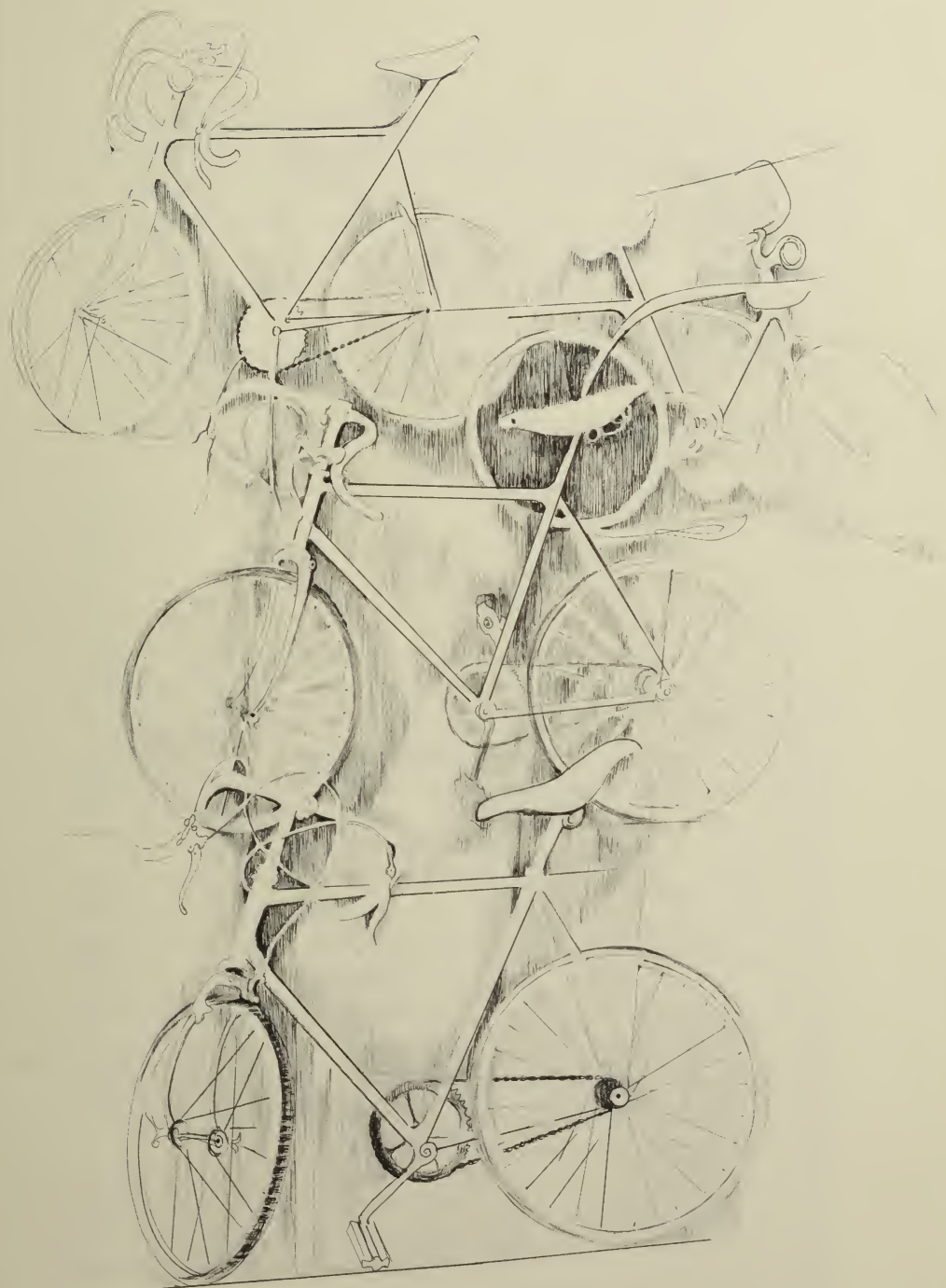
a need to hear them drone  
under all other sounds,  
security like breathing.

MICHAEL MOTT

C

Curled in a ball. A riddle.  
Not a cat. This one unfolds  
somewhat like feathers, or perhaps  
like the peeled segments of an orange.  
White, but yellow everywhere it meets  
the green—almost gray green.  
Painted by masters. Set by some  
only against the snow.

MICHAEL MOTT



# Creative Writing in New Mexico

*There's nothing wrong with this.*

*It's ready to send out.*

TOM MAYER

**M**y one and constant certainty about creative writing courses, as catalogs persist in describing them, is that the subject is unteachable. The gratifications for an instructor, at least for this one, are infrequent. Most student writing is hopelessly unprofessional, much of it is profoundly uninteresting, and even when students make diligent efforts to improve in accordance with your suggestions the results are usually discouraging.

As a pastime I teach people to fly airplanes, and in many a despondent moment I have compared that pursuit with my work in writing classes. Almost never in six years of directing writing courses have I had the feeling of accomplishment, the pure teacher's pride and satisfaction, that I get whenever one of my flying students makes his first solo—then I always know that the student is up there by grace of the Continental Motor Company and the understanding and skill, the visible proficiency and testable knowledge, that I have imparted to him.

Writing courses do not work that way, or they don't for me. You can talk about the subject with some intelligence and veracity, you can conduct classes that are lively with repartee. You can encourage students to familiarize themselves with the work habits



of the famous, and repeat aphorisms about style and form (Theodore Morrison, the novelist and Harvard professor emeritus, used to admonish his students to "Begin where the action becomes inevitable," which has always seemed to me an idea of great merit, but is one which has yet to help me when confronted by a blank sheet of paper), and refer students to the work of successful authors who reflect their interests or literary bents, but in the end you are never sure you have done anything more than spotlight a few strands of ephemera.

Serious writing is, I believe, much less amenable to dabbling, less rewarding to amateur enthusiasm, than a number of the other arts. Often I have been envious of my colleagues in painting, sculpture, music, photography. Every art, and perhaps even such joke crafts as basket weaving, requires of its professional practitioners an irreducible if undefinable minimum of innate talent, but in all the arts except writing the most inept student may be rewarded by learning basic techniques. A student whose mind is utterly pedestrian in the visual sense may spend many interesting hours delving into the intricacies of the dark room; a pianist with an unsure sense of rhythm may obtain pleasure in mastering the scales, and in each case the teacher is entitled to my flight instructor's satisfaction in his pupil's tangible progress.

By the time an aspirant writer reaches college, or college age, he is accomplished in the finger exercises of his vocation, or the chances are that he will never learn them at all. An ear for dialogue, an eye for detail, adequate vocabulary, an affinity for narrative, an appreciation of anecdote, the knack of discerning congenial material, and, most of all, a fresh and distinctive sense of language, of style, of the shapes of paragraphs and the relationships of words and the rhythms of sentences, are natural abilities, mysterious but developable gifts like a major league arm, or else they are the by-products of much reading, skills that are the osmosis of a deeply-indulged passion for literature. We are all of us unwitting students of language and the storyteller's techniques from infancy onward, and if after twelve or more years of schooling and eighteen or more years of extracurricular

exposure a student does not command the basic requisites no class or teacher or earth is going to be able to remedy the situation.

I spend most of the first class period of each term telling my students just that. I cannot show them how to write stories which will sell, or novels which will be additions to our literature, or poems which are poetry. Always a few of them ask, well why should we bother to take this course, what value is there in it for us? Sometimes, when I am not up to serious and honorable confrontation with a hard problem, I say, think of it this way: it's a living for your teacher. Other times I evade with a bad and tired analogy: you should take this course for the same reason that touch football in the park on Sunday morning increases your appreciation of the real game Dandy and Frank and Howard telecast on Monday night. (Among other problems with this line are the heartfelt hisses and boos it is apt to draw from women students.)

The real justification for writing courses, the reason that enables me to keep directing them with a belief that they serve a positive purpose and without feeling completely mired in the manifold frustrations, is so undemocratic and potentially discouraging that I am loathe to explain it to most students. It is simply this: every so often a writer comes through my class, a young man or woman who is doing authentic and interesting work, who perhaps is on the verge of professional competence, and at the very least the class constitutes an audience of appreciative contemporaries, some of whom may be astute enough to offer useful criticisms. I believe that the bedrock satisfaction of serious writing is the solution of artistic problems. Mine is a lonely pursuit and the highest rewards are the most private (recognition is nice, money is nicer; however, I think I would keep on writing even if I knew there was neither market nor audience for my efforts), but the encouragement of acclaim, especially when a writer is just beginning to find his voice, is no insignificant elixir.

A minor ancillary benefit of writing courses is beating the university gamesmanship factor. If a student does all the work expected of him in each of his classes, he will be pressed for

time. If the student is also a writer, he will inevitably slight his classes and responsibilities to pursue his avocation. Enrollment in a writing class will give at least a portion of the time he needs and satisfy the demands of the dean's office as well.

### *encouragement vs. advice*

The relationship of the student who is a writer and the director of his writing class is tenuous, delicate, sometimes stormy, and usually difficult for both participants. It should be close to the relationship of a careful, conscientious editor and a professional writer, but the student writer is often unsure of himself, still tentative about his work, too inexperienced to know when an editor is wrong, too close to his work to be able to discuss and alter with dispassion. The instructor, I believe, should be actually aware of a dual role: he should try to be an honest and thorough critic, ready to pass on those nuances of technique which are explicable, yet he should try to remember that encouragement is more important than advice. Most of the elements in writing, and all of the important ones, a writer must learn, and relearn, for himself, but sometimes a friendly word from a respected source at a crucial time can be an important stimulus to energy and self-esteem.

I remember two such occasions in my own early career and shall remain grateful always to the people who provided them. The first writing course I took was during my freshman year at Harvard. The instructor was William Weigand, a novelist who now teaches at San Francisco State. He was a man of forbidding reserve, quiet, precise, judicious in criticism, a Midwesterner and a baseball fanatic, and except for that last quality he seemed to me unapproachably remote. I knew then that I wanted to be a writer, had wanted to be one since a bad arm and rendered dreams of baseball glory impractical at the age of eleven, but I did not really believe I could become a writer; I had not been able to jump that psychic gap between a rather wistful concept of potentiality and certain self-knowledge of what I was, until

one day when Bill handed a story back to me and said in his diffident, completely unemotional way. "There's nothing wrong with this. It's ready to send out."

The other occasion was after the publication of my first book. I was writing a series of sketches about Santa Fe, my home town, which had been met with a chilly, unanimous disinterest by magazine editors. I had worked hard on the sketches, tried my best to make them funny and true. Partly because I was inexperienced and partly because the material was very important and close to me, the rejections shook me badly, eroded my confidence to the point where I doubted both my subjects and my ability to realize them.

One of my best friends was Mary Louise Aswell, a novelist herself and an editor of great tact and perception. (She was one of the first to recognize Truman Capote's abilities and edited much of his early work, and she was responsible in several ways for Fritz Peters' fine novel *The World Next Door*, among many other achievements). She knew something of my problems and asked to read my recent stories.

With considerable trepidation I gave her one about an improvident and pompous and lonely old drunk, a widower and Williams graduate who kept himself abreast of contemporary literature through the Readers Digest Condensed Books. He carried a mahogany cane and wore three-piece suits in a town where millionaires made it a point to buy their everyday attire in the work clothes department of Penny's. His one certifiable achievement in life beyond his Williams degree was a lieutenantancy in the Army in World War I, though his military career had ended after a handcar accident near a training depot. He had no close relatives and only one friend, my father, who was his complete opposite: shrewd in business, a cherished companion, a wit, unpretentious, head of a thriving family. My father drank with him every afternoon before supper (the children's hour—my brother and I were instructed to stay away, on pain of severe if unnamed punishment), and nourished his ego with systematic military promotions. This went on over a period of twenty years, until the old drunk



was called major general by everyone who knew him, and even came to believe in his rank himself. Mary Lou read my story and said, "Editors are often fools."

In this theme of encouragement I try to run my classes with the utmost latitude. I believe that talent is perishable as well as precious, and the patterns of its expression are nearly always unusual and highly varied. I have no formal lesson plans. I use no texts. I do not deliver lectures, though I try to explain technical matters as they are raised by specific student projects. We read and discuss student work, and if there is none I dismiss the class.

I have had a few doctrinaire teachers take exception to my procedures. I usually try to answer their questions and criticisms by asking what sort of lesson plan they would employ if by chance both Thomas Wolfe and Malcolm Lowry enrolled in their course. Wolfe of course could turn out one of his gigantic novels in less than an academic year. Lowry spent more than a decade writing *Under the Volcano*, and it was the only fully realized work of his life. Or, I say, what sort of exercises for the development of style would you devise for a young Katherine Anne Porter?

My only requirement is that each student submit one piece of work during the course of the term. The choice of genre and length is entirely up to him. Most students submit a great deal more, and every semester a few tell me that my course is too hard, that they spend more time on it than any other, that the lack of neatly defined assignments is a trial and an unwelcome responsibility. But, whether that is so or not, I would rather allow any number of students to indulge their sloth than risk tampering with the mechanism of one bona fide writer, and, in my estimation, that risk is high.

During my second year at Harvard I took Theodore Morrison's course. He was a kind and understanding gentleman, and in many ways a helpful teacher, but he did require a manuscript every month. In order to avoid a poor grade I gave him a draft of a story called Bubble Gum and Kipling before I was finished with it, while certain aspects of it were unresolved in my own mind. He praised it, and had me read it to the class, which liked

it, but I needed almost a full year of tinkering before I finished it to my satisfaction. The job would have taken about two days had not the well intentioned, often shrewd suggestions of professor and class kept intruding and confusing my judgment.

The assignment of grades in writing courses is a singularly thankless and thorny task. My method, if I may so dignify it, seems to me inadequate, perhaps unfair, and I look forward to the day when grades are abolished entirely. I give A's to work which I would publish were I an editor. Because the subject is so unconcrete I think any reasonable effort, regardless of the quality of the result, merits a B. I give D's to the habitually negligent, and fail those students who make no effort at all, but the grade of C seems superfluous, for how can you deem any sincere work of the imagination average?

In the end, for me, to work with even a few students who are writers more than balances the rest, or I should find other employment. I have had four such students in six years, but contact with each of them has furnished a renewal of enthusiasm. I shall never forget the first really good story I received. The author was a shy and pretty girl, delicate, not quite five feet tall, who spoke rarely in class and then only with extreme caution. Her story was about a young woman struggling for her sanity in an institution—a common topic in student writing—but it was perceptive, precisely paced, true in concept and honest in execution, written in a prose that was exact and flexible. The story was real as my work desk, and as immediate. I knew everything of significance about the character when I finished, I understood why she was the way she was, and I cared about what happened to her. There wasn't a word I wanted to change. Next class I quoted Bill Weigand: "There's nothing wrong with this. It's ready to send out."



THE COMPLAINT OF THEODORE PRODROMOS

(*floruit 1140*)

My father told me, "Son, study!"  
believed in it, would bend down  
to whisper in my ear: "Over there!  
That man's feet were once muddy.  
There once were lice upon his gown  
bigger than almonds. You want to wear  
pointed shoes of expensive kid  
like his, wear silk, bathe and smell  
of perfumed soaps? Study! Learn!  
You must do what that man did,  
work as hard and do as well."  
He would hold my shoulder; his eyes would burn  
bright as the lamp I studied by  
for all those years with pains, with patience.  
I did as he told me. I hold degrees—  
and nothing else. One cannot buy  
bread with declensions and conjugations,  
or wine with the learning of Socrates.  
I peer in my cupboard. A man should see  
cheese, sardines, olives, a crust  
of bread. I see only lecture notes.  
I search my pocket. Might a coin be  
down near the seams in the pocket dust?  
Pieces of paper, scribbled with quotes.  
My poor father! His poor son!  
Better had I become an apprentice  
to a craftsman—embroiderer or tailor.  
I could put the embroidery on  
gentlemen's clothes and be content. Is  
this a life? I am weaker, paler



than any apprentice, and older, and curse  
in all my learned languages learning.  
I pray for coppers, dream of gold.  
Study, study! Study my purse.  
Learn if these notes might be good for burning.  
I am master of hunger, doctor of cold.

DAVID R. SLAVITT



# I Give it the Whole Business

*An interview with Edward Villella  
on dance as education*

AR: *What is the education of a dancer?*

VILLELLA: The best age to start is probably between eight and ten because that's the time when, generally speaking, the body is right, the muscles are developed and the bone is already firm. If it's still soft, it can be distorted because of the extraordinary situations that we put our bodies into. At this age the mind can absorb the ideas and the theories, and the body can then accept them. Even before you start, you must have in mind where you are going in dance. By that I mean on what terms. When you think that as a child of eight or nine you've got to comprehend what your future will be, it's really up to the parent, and the parent has to recognize dozens of factors—the child's facility for movement, the child's quality of movement, the child's temperament, the child's sensitivity, the child's musicality, the shape of a child's foot, which is a very important idea because the child has to have a very good arch, a very high arch because the foot naturally is very articulate in what we do. The length of the leg as against the length of the waist, the length of the neck, the size of the head, the head can't be too large, and the neck can't be too short. The shoulders, you have to take into consideration all of these things, plus the muscle tone, just the quality of the muscle tone. Muscles are in any number of tones. Generally boys have

hard, brittle, very stiff muscle tones. If a girl has that muscle, she has a problem to overcome. If a boy has a lyric muscle tone, long, slim, slender muscles which need stretching, then the boy has a problem to overcome, because this muscle tone doesn't give you the power needed to jump. All of these things have to be taken into consideration if that parent is thinking in terms of a professional career for that child. But the parent may be just thinking in terms of opening that child's mind, and of opening up horizons. Anybody who has a facility to move, and who has a body adequate in a dancer's terms, can get so many things, a sense of acting, a sense of moving, a sense of aesthetics, and it opens up the whole art world to him. Naturally, if he is interested in dance, then he's curious enough to go to the theater, and that opens up all kinds of things to him.

*AR: Does it work also for the child who really doesn't have all the things you talked about? Is it still a worthwhile pursuit?*

VILLELLA: I think it is, so long as you keep in mind this is not going to be another Pavlova, another Nijinski, or anything like that. That's very unreal, if that's up front. I know lots of people who dance just because they love to dance. It's a marvelous experience, just to be able to dance. And, if you never make it on the stage, if you have an open mind about it, I don't think you'll suffer. I know a lot of people do suffer, who haven't really made it, and there are people in ballet companies who haven't really made it, and they keep suffering from it.

*AR: How much of this suffering goes on among children?*

VILLELLA: I think kids are pretty realistic. They know where they're at. Most of the parents don't know where they are at, and where a child is. And quite often they're living vicariously through their child. They just don't view it objectively, they think that, of course, their child is very special, and they'll do anything. If the child shows promise and then develops, then both the child and the parent have to make a decision whether to go on with it and whether to divert all of their energies. It just about takes

that. It takes about all of your time and energy, and it's very hard to fit in another education.

AR: *Does the child who is committed need another education?*

VILLELLA: Not necessarily so. I find that there are two types. One is just naturally open, facile, and these pick up their education. I've also known a lot of people who have gone to college who are not very interesting, so it depends on what you mean by education. I know a lot of dancers who, just because of the nature of the work, and because of the nature of their exposure, and because they are sensitive and of a particular temperament, and because they are actively developing their art just by the things that they are touched by, with experience enough, will get into it and will, in a way, establish their own form of education. I know lots and lots of people like that, who have never had a formal education, but who are very bright, very well read, very interesting people.

AR: *Have most dancers, by the end of their career, had a sound, helpful education.*

VILLELLA: I think so, even when you consider that a career such as ours has a terrible paradox built into it. As you mature and develop, naturally, the better you become, the more sensitive your performance becomes. And then you reach the point where one side is going to let the other side down, when if you continue with your experience and your artistry, perhaps on the physical side there will have to be a lessening. And if you can structure an ideal, something you've invented, and you have to change it, that is why, as you say, you crash. As a realistic individual you have not only to produce a beautiful and necessary art, but you're a very practical performer. You're really dealing with yourself. You know what you are about and how you open your mind; it's part of an instrument. You really have to be a very practical person about how much sleep you get, about what you eat and where you go, how you train, how you treat your muscles, what kind of doctors you go to, what kind of pills you take and don't



take. You get to be a very practical individual.

AR: *Doesn't anybody who can sustain himself in a ballet career learn to cope with himself, even someone who is in the corps for fifteen years?*

VILLELLA: Again, there are two ways to look at that. For some kids just being in the corps is a terrible frustration. And for others it's still an exciting experience, they're in a company, they are dancing professionals, and, as you say, just the idea of coping is educating. I mean the discipline of going on stage and having to function in your own terms. That's the other thing; you show yourself all the time. You're constantly showing yourself.

AR: *I gather that schools don't really have to worry about the education of the dancer. The ballet companies and their ballet schools seem to be working very well.*

VILLELLA: Yes. But I think that part of the whole thinking in some way ought to be towards a little more formal education. Kids in the New York City Ballet go to a couple of private schools here in New York which are specifically for professional children. And it might be a better situation if the actual school work were done on the premises.

AR: *Do the kids feel that formal schooling is important?*

VILLELLA: I think so. Not at the time, but it becomes important to them. And also, just the idea of having to travel back and forth between two institutions is a drag, having to rush to take academic classes and ballet. If it were all within one complex where you'd have a study hall and a library and your academic classes, and on the next floor all the studios, I think it'd be a much better idea and much easier for everybody concerned. And I think also it might be more directed toward what the whole field is all about, with art appreciation courses and music courses and things like that. Not that it's essential. I think that it's just helpful. My education was, of course, completely ridiculous in that respect. I was trained to go to sea, that was my formal education. And

cargo handling and navigation and seamanship don't help me very much. It doesn't really matter in the long run, but I'm glad I had those experiences. That opened up a whole other area in my life, but a couple of electives in my interests would have made things come more alive, and it would have been better for many reasons. Now I find that because of the nature of the work I rarely even get time to read the magazines I subscribe to, *Horizons*, *Realités*, things like that.

AR: *How much of an education do you get from working intensively with the very giants, with Balanchine and Robbins?*

VILLELLA: Sure, that in itself is wonderful education. When you work with brilliant people, it can't help but rub off. You gain so much from where they are at. It took Balanchine some sixty years to get where he is, and when you work with him, you're already where he is at sixty years later. When that rubs off, you're really ahead of the game, you can't help but profit. And it's the same thing with Robbins, who started his career in a more commercial background; he worked on Broadway, and because he was tops in that area, you get all of those advantages too.

AR: *Does the feeling of inadequate academic schooling diminish?*

VILLELLA: I think that it disappears completely. If you're working on a particular ballet the work takes you through a background. That's part of your education. If you're exposed to the ballet "The Prodigal Son," and if you don't happen to know the story of the prodigal son, you go out and learn it, you read about it, and research it. Of necessity you've got to be interested in it because you can't just walk on stage and take whatever's been given you and show it. You have to develop it, you have to develop every moment of it on stage. So where do you start. You have to have some background. You know you can't just wing it off the top of your head. That just doesn't work. So naturally you investigate all the aspects of it. You investigate Prokofiev. What you feel stems from his ideas. He had to have ideas, he didn't just put notes together. If you were writing something called "The Prodigal

Son,” you’d have to have some ideas. You look and search and listen for those ideas. You view the painter, Roualt, for the decor of the set, and that in itself can set a style, the look of the shapes, the colors and the angles, and you develop that. And, naturally, you take Balanchine and his choreography, and the movement. And then you have your own style and your own temperament, and you become the vehicle for this ballet. In the process you open yourself to ten more things.

AR: *Is ballet a good way to teach?*

VILLELLA: I think it’s a magnificent way, not only for something like the parable of the prodigal son. For instance, take Stravinsky, a complex modern composer. I’ve been associated with him for fifteen years, naturally, through his music, and I’ve found him very difficult to understand. But when I see the music, when Balanchine choreographs a score, he lets you see the music, and it immediately becomes far more apparent what he was at, where he was going, what he was doing, how he sectionalized things, how he developed the architecture of the score. You can see it. You’re also hearing it. The first time I heard “Agon,” I was baffled by it. But then when I saw the score taken apart, and Balanchine used the whole thing, it became apparent. It’s complex, but most complexities are based on a consistent series of very logical and simple ideas which remain complex until you understand them. It’s like anything else, anything’s complex if you don’t understand it.

AR: *But most ballet classes stick to technique.*

VILLELLA: Yes, you certainly need technique. I mean there’s no way around that. But we have a very interesting situation now at the school, The School of the American Ballet, which is actually the school for the New York City Ballet. And we have certain ballets that we use children in—“Nutcracker,” “Midsummer Night’s Dream,” “Harlequinade,” and there are probably one or two others which I can’t think of at the moment. But “Nutcracker” brings the children into all the operations of the theater, the

work rooms and so on. It introduces them to the discipline, exposes them to Tchaikovsky, and the magic of fantasy. "A Midsummer Night's Dream" exposes them not only to Mendelssohn and to Shakespeare, but also to Oberon, Titania, Hippolyta, and Puck, and there you have a whole series of experiences. And "Harlequinade," exposes them to commedia dell'arte, a different style, and to the characters of Harlequin and Columbine, and you have a whole theater history that they will already be exposed to.

AR: *What about the kids in the audience? Is this kind of exposure strong enough or clear enough?*

VILLELLA: My son is a good example because he's been around. He's four and a half years old. He saw "Nutcracker" last year for the first time. He knows that I'm a dancer, he knows that I go to class, and he's seen me at rehearsals, and he's seen me in a couple of performances. But when he came to see "Nutcracker," he was three and a half, and his mind was absolutely blown, and he knew that this was his thing. And every time he comes here he asks for "Nutcracker" to be put on, and when it's put on, he dances the entire thing. He has conceptions, interesting steps, and it's not very easy dancing. He does it in his own way, but because he's been exposed to the form of classical training, just by seeing it, some of that has rubbed off. He gets into some of the positions. Just in the lifting of his leg, he knows his leg has to be lifted in the back, to simulate an arabesque. But also with each little section that he's doing he starts with a theme and then he goes on and on and on, and then he comes back and develops the theme. It's really frightening. Where did he get it from? He just saw it on the stage.

AR: *Do older kids get that much out of exposure to a performance, or out of ballet classes?*

VILLELLA: Well, the problem with the older person trying to learn how to get started in dance is very sad. Some of these people constantly come in after a performance, and they want to know if they can start, how long it will take. And it's not like anything



else. You really have to get started at a very early age. There are examples of people starting much later, but usually they have either exactly the right muscle tone, or the proper body proportions and distinctive qualities of movement. A prime example is Youskevitch, who started very late. But he was an Olympic class gymnast. He had a lot going for him before he started.

AR: *But developing interest by technical training works. Whenever you go to the ballet there is always someone sitting behind you who talks about her own dancing, and these are clearly not former professionals.*

VILLELLA: Once you've started, once you're exposed to it and you're given any kind of encouragement, your enthusiasm is incredible. And your discipline is astounding. Each time you watch a group of thirty kids in this day and age with that kind of concentration, all of them dedicated at least to the moment if not to the whole idea, the whole philosophy, it is extraordinarily impressive. As a child I was never taken to a ballet. But in being taken, for instance, to a museum, or something like that, I always hated it. I never got anything out of it. I found them tedious and boring and impersonal. I thought that I was being dragged along. Consequently, I had no interest whatsoever. I don't think that we were properly prepared before we went. Maybe it's a little different in ballet—in just bringing people to a ballet, a group of people. I think it's probably a little better to have it a little more individualized, you know, maybe a group of eight or ten, with a couple of people along who already know something about it, and simply to talk a little bit about it.

AR: *Parents?*

VILLELLA: Parents, sure. That's the best situation. "Nutcracker" is so fantastic because parents bring three or four kids. It's small, individualized, and in addition to that, it's perfect because it's holiday time, and because there are kids on stage as well and the kids can relate easily to their counterparts.

AR: *To what extent do you want the education of your son to be*

*creative, in technique or result? What are your expectations, as a performing artist, in the education of your son?*

VILLELLA: I think he's started off very well right now. He's going to a nursery school, and he already can almost tell time, which is a big deal for a kid because it encompasses so many ideas. So he's on his way, he's got a running start. And he's been exposed to theater and to ballet and to music at this point in his life; he is growing up with it, none of this is foreign to him, it's all part of waking up in the morning and eating and going about the day. It's a part of everything. I'd like him to be exposed to another language. I think the most important part of his education, past learning how to read, write, and add and subtract, is this whole idea of creativity, because it is freedom. That's a tremendous idea for anybody, to be free, for your thoughts to be free, and to be able to express your thoughts freely. So many people are inhibited, they don't know how to express themselves, and if they do know how, they are afraid to. That is a terrible thing to have to live with. It's such a corny term, to express himself, but it's really so important to all of us, I mean to be able to do it. I feel that I'm very fortunate that I have at least the physical ability to express myself, not to be afraid, not to hold back. When I'm on stage, that's it, that is me. I give it the whole business. And it's hard for a lot of kids especially now. Look at the demands that are made upon them. A kid who's just growing up, who's just getting into physics or science or whatever, has got to face men on the moon. That's a tremendous challenge. And how can a kid be completely wrong in writing an essay or paper expressing an idea about a book. If that's the way it's coming out of him, he can't be completely wrong. If it's open and free and flowing, there's nothing completely wrong about that. The important thing is to establish interest, and to make it so that it's not larger than life, not bigger than and beyond the kid. He doesn't want to get involved with it when he's scared to death of it. In my education certain things were just too huge, I simply couldn't understand them, I thought I wouldn't be able to under-

stand them. I got through them all because I analysed what was required to get through an exam, but I never understood the subject. The moment I got past the exam, that was it. My interest was killed in it, I would never again go back to it because it terrified me; I just wiped it out, let it go by. But in ballet, you watch kids work. They stay after class and they come before class. Kids in the corps de ballet on a break are off in a corner, and they're going over that step that they were learning in four counts that they can't get, and they can't get the syncopation on the third beat, and they go over it, and they try and try. They're getting into it, they're doing it, and nobody is forcing them to do it. Our society is such now that most people work two hours, and then bang; you stop and you don't do anything again until the bell rings, or the time is right, and then off you go.

*AR: What extent of traditional schooling would you expect from the school which is going to end up with your son at age thirteen?*

VILLELLA: There are certain things that kids have to know, that people have to know. You just have to know how to read, to count and add and subtract, to be able to balance a checkbook later on. It's the duty of the school to find out the essentials and make sure that the child learns those essentials. And after that I think it's the obligation of the school to discover where his real interests are, and to develop those, and not to force interests upon him. I would hope that there would be proper structures for him to develop along those lines and not to be forced into learning things which don't interest him. Certain subjects in school and college were just a waste of time. Fidgeting, sitting cramped, I had a cramped muscle right in the middle of my head from just sitting there. Not to say that one shouldn't be aware of these subjects, but they never meant a thing to me, and they don't now. I think you have to be aware of the fact that there are laws of physics, but to have to get that far into it technically, I was wasting my time when it could have been spent in areas that I really would like to have explored.

AR: *Do you think your misgivings about that are because it wasn't taught creatively?*

VILLELLA: Possibly. It was very dry to me. It was a series of numbers and formulas and laws that had absolutely no interest to me at all.

AR: *Was there someone in your education who in any way encouraged your development in any artistic field?*

VILLELLA: That was pretty much my own doing simply because I started very early at what I was doing, and I'm a very physical person. I have a sense of the physical. I stopped dancing for four years at one time, and it was a very frustrating period for me. The only thing that got me through it was that I was steeped in athletics; I buried myself in that kind of movement. I can't say that there was any one individual; it was an early exposure to ballet. Having been exposed finally to the School of American Ballet, to the New York City Ballet, to George Balanchine, to all of those terrific dancers who were around at that time, to have taken classes with them, that's the important factor.

AR: *Then there was nothing in your schooling which developed any of your interests?*

VILLELLA: Well, I developed an interest in economics and business from school and from a couple of teachers. Not that I'm steeped in economics, but I'm interested in business, and I'm always looking at the financial pages and reading magazines that relate to economics.

AR: *Because of some teachers?*

VILLELLA: There were two very interesting teachers. They were good teachers, and they had reasonable personalities. I almost got the feeling that some teachers were very pleased to have superior knowledge, and to have a superior position, and that they were imposing that upon you. That I found offending, and there was nothing you could do about it. And when you found a reason-



able person who knew what he was doing, knew what he was about, it was much easier naturally for a kid to respond to something like that. I found these two guys very much in that vein. In physics and chemistry the wonder of all of it, the excitement of it all, the possibilities were never presented to me. It was dry, and it was out of a book.

AR: *In your estimation do school and college dance programs offer any realistic support of the arts?*

VILLELLA: Many ballet schools now have adult classes because people want to learn about it. Not only that, they want to use their bodies. People are becoming more and more aware of the sedentary lives they are leading. But also, they have gone to see ballet, and they want to understand more about it, and they study it. Some famous people are ballet freaks. Actresses who are in their forties take ballet just because they've been exposed to it, they want to know about it, they get into it, and they do it. That in itself explains, or gives you a reason, for having courses, for having situations. Hopefully high school and college programs can help out the student who has earlier been exposed but who cannot, for one reason or another, continue. They understand they're not going to become professionals, but they still would like to do it. Look at all of the kids who participate in college athletics. How many of them become professional athletes? Why do they do it? They're interested, they want to be active, they want to compete. I don't know all of the reasons, but they do it. There are terrifically valid reasons for all of these programs. And then again this corny, clichéd idea of expression. To be in front of an audience is an invaluable experience, just to be on stage. If there are ten people in the audience, or a thousand, it's a whole other world just to be up there.

AR: *Do you think creativity can be taught?*

VILLELLA: I don't think you can teach anybody to be creative. You can loosen their abilities, you can release the things that they have in them. You can teach them the basics, and you can teach

them all those fundamentals, and you can give them the techniques, and you can release their confidences, their strengths. You can allow them to be what they really are, to see what's possible. You can allow them to seek and to expose their own potentials. I'm not quite sure that you can teach anybody to be creative. If you can establish a confidence for that individual, if you can release the inhibitions, if you can give the person fundamentals, and then bring out of that person everything that's there, or just get that person interested and confident enough to seek and expose his own potentials, it's a great thing.

### THE WISE GUY

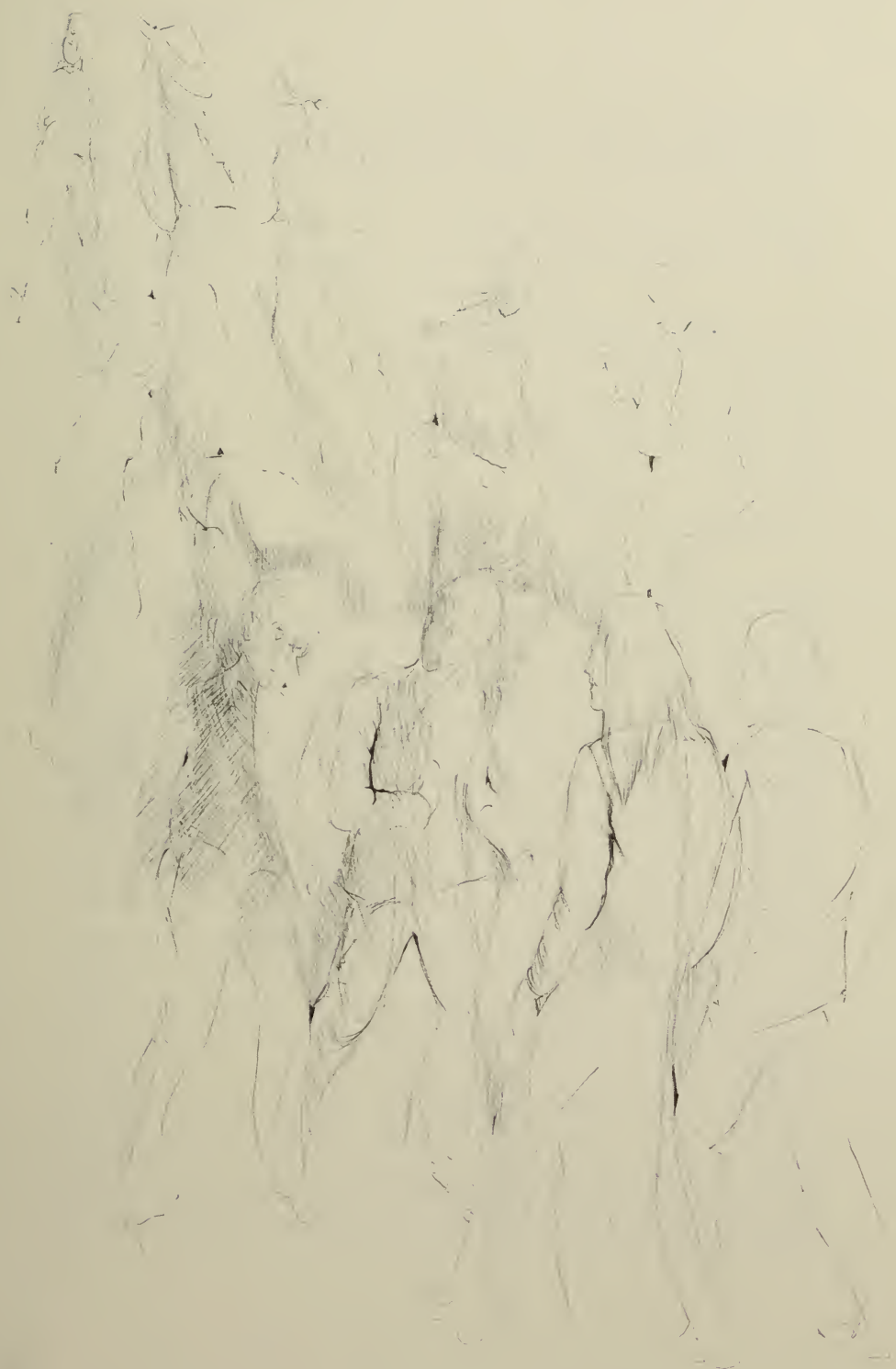
Suddenly the desk gave way, the sky darkened,  
and I was left stranded in my underwear on an empty beach.  
Red-faced, I hid behind a rock,  
shouting, Okay, who's the wise guy who clipped  
my duds? and thinking, Nobody talks  
like that; nobody uses words like *clipped* and *duds* anymore.

By now the waves had begun to part, though, like hair  
parted down the middle, revealing a thin scalp of sand  
and a huge sponge-like brain the color of dust.

I covered my crotch with my hand and slid  
out from behind the rock just as that brain  
shot-up from the water and hung there slithering  
on the spike of the horizon like one of those comic  
book blobs that eats-up everything.

Okay, I shouted, who's the wise  
guy?—thinking, Things don't happen like this; I'm really  
fully clothed, asleep at my desk at the university.  
But the sky turned to gray flannel,  
and the brain huffed and puffed  
and blew my underwear off.

JAMES REISS



# Artists-in-Schools, Colorado

## *Emissaries of art*

DUNCAN POLLOCK

**B**ob LeDonne, an affable 28-year-old artist, is giving a classroom demonstration of the potter's art in a suburban high school near Denver, Colorado. Though consigned to a dim, cramped space in a distant wing of the school building, LeDonne takes little notice of his surroundings or the milling of students about the room. He starts to work right away by carefully kneading the clay. Then he kicks the potter's wheel in motion, and slowly but surely begins to transform the raw hunks of wet earth into shapely vessels, jars, and bowls fit for a king's table. While LeDonne works over the wheel, he seems oblivious to the students. But he is also a natural performer, and speaks so eloquently with his hands that his audience is soon drawn into the very center of this silent ritual. When the hour is over—all too soon for some—you can almost hear a pin drop in the room. "Bob works magic when he's here in the school," observes a local administrator. "He's so involved in what he is doing that it just naturally rubs off on these kids."

His particular brand of magic isn't confined to one school in Colorado, but is being worked again and again in hundreds of school districts throughout the country, or wherever there exists an Artists-in-Schools Program. This is an experimental venture funded jointly by the U. S. Office of Education and the National



Endowment for the Arts, an independent agency of the federal government. Under terms of the program, professional painters, sculptors, dancers, musicians, filmmakers, poets, and craftsmen like LeDonne are recruited for active duty in public elementary and secondary schools. Their assignment, in a word, is to engage youngsters in the discipline and essence of their arts in a way totally new for the children and their schools.

The methodology employed by this program is new in the sense that it differs from the norm. The professionals involved do not really function as teachers, but as working artists. Their tenure in the school may last only a few days or a full semester. They give no grades, and have no administrative responsibilities, but they do make art in the classroom and are sometimes able to instill an awareness of the creative process that is so often lacking in the American School system.

A growing number of critics, in fact, regularly cite the "system" for its failure to encourage methods of nurturing esthetic awareness or participative experience in the arts, and for failing to incorporate the arts into the standard curricula. It goes without saying that music, dance, painting and other creative disciplines are seldom considered integral to a child's education. By the time that child has finished kindergarten or nursery school, he has also completed the most consistent course in the arts he is likely to get in the school, and even then, the creative exercise may consist only of cutting out paper turkeys or filling in the numbers of a coloring book. In the higher grades, art is usually an elective course—implying that such endeavors aren't quite as important as other subjects in the educative process. "Many teachers and administrators look upon the arts as a frill. . . . something you can do when everything else is done," says Dr. Judith Wray, director of the Artists-in-Schools Program in Colorado. "Children are told by society in general and by schools in particular that creativity and the arts aren't useful later in life."

Beyond this shortcoming, there exists an atmosphere in the school system which often curtails the natural spontaneity and expressiveness of children. It is no secret that creativity or the

urge to make “magic” are generally eradicated by schooling at about grade four. Something happens in the classrooms between kindergarten and adolescence—as we get on with the business of learning—to stifle the creative impulse in children. As Charles Silberman has presented the case in his book, *Crisis in the Classroom*: “It is not possible to spend any prolonged period visiting the public school classroom without being appalled by the mutilation visible everywhere—mutilation of spontaneity, of joy in learning, of pleasure in creating, of sense of self. . . .”

### *Mutilation . . . everywhere*

In large measure, the Artists-in-School Program is a response to this kind of indictment. Authors of the program hope that it will make fundamental change possible within the school system by giving the arts a more meaningful place in the curriculum. They also believe that formative experience in the creative arts can help expand the personality of the child, and develop his emotional attitudes and receptivity to the process of learning in other fields.

Seeds for this innovative program were planted in 1965 with passage of the comprehensive Elementary and Secondary Education Act. As funds became available, the Office of Education encouraged school systems and arts organizations to develop a number of cooperative projects. The first of these occurred during the 1966-67 school year when the poet Kenneth Koch began teaching poetry to third, fourth, and fifth graders in a public school on Manhattan's lower East Side through a grant which the Endowment made to the American Academy of Poets. In 1969, the Office of Education transferred \$100,000 to the Endowment for the purpose of placing visual artists in secondary schools in six states, including Colorado. The pilot project proved successful enough so that in the following year, \$900,000 was made available, and the Artists-in-Schools Program was officially launched.

From these somewhat modest beginnings, the program has grown to roughly \$3 million in the current year, with a hefty increase budgeted for 1974-75. This seems a relatively insignificant sum compared to other federal programs, but most independent

observers believe the money is being well spent. Agency funds from Washington are also apportioned to state arts councils for spending at the local level to ensure that the program doesn't develop into another lumbering, federal behemoth.

In Colorado, the pattern of spending and development is fairly typical of other states. The Colorado Council on the Arts and Humanities administers ongoing programs in poetry, film, and visual arts. Funds to match the federal grant are provided by participating schools and by the agency itself through staff support and other in-kind services. Schools are invited to "apply" for an artist-in-residence, and are usually selected on the basis of geographic distribution, population mix, and receptivity to the aims of the program. The school children are black, white, and brown; from poor, comfortable, and affluent homes; from urban, suburban, and rural areas of the state.

The artists are chosen by separate panels operating under the Council's wing. This is perhaps the most difficult task, as Dr. Wray concedes, because "a good artist doesn't necessarily make a good teacher." But beyond this requirement, the artist-emissary has to be as supple as a reed, for he or she is expected to work in concert with the regular classroom teacher in an atmosphere that can often give way to resentment or suspicion.

Chuck Lovett, an instructor who commands the sculpture and ceramics post at Arvada High School, admits he had reservations about working with LeDonne. "I thought he was going to undermine my ideas at first, but Bob has made the class a little more exciting, and I'm enjoying the exchange of ideas." If a teacher isn't at all receptive, however, the Council will normally shift the burden rather than run the risk of creating friction in the classroom. Dr. Wray defends the policy of limiting the attack to friendly neighbors: "Why should we force an outside artist on the teacher when it may be terribly detrimental to the program?" she asks. "Ultimately, we'd like to reach all the teachers, but we simply can't blanket the state with the resources we have at present."

Despite limited funds, the Artist-in-Schools Program has already reached far out into the Colorado community. Thirty-six artists have performed creative work in more than 150 schools during

the past four years, involving some 24,000 students and hundreds of teachers. All of the artists are paid for their efforts; some actually “teach,” while others function as resource persons. Bob LeDonne sees himself as a working artist whose primary job is to motivate students by constantly producing high-grade pottery in the classroom, with or without an audience. Sheer numbers and the weight of administrative duties prohibit the regular teacher from making art during class hours, so LeDonne provides an added dimension for art students at Arvada. He pushes himself as hard in the school as he would in the studio while preparing for an exhibition, and this fact isn’t lost on the students. One high school youngster from Boulder, Colorado made the observation: “When sitting in a class, how can one learn what is going on in the world of art from a teacher whose job is to teach? One can only learn from someone whose job is making art.”

The artists involved in poetry and film projects, on the other hand, usually take command of the class for shorter periods of time. One poet will draw her students into a metaphor game by asking them to make associations between natural objects and the human anatomy. Another deals with sensory images. He will ask what lightning smells like, what fear looks like, what loneliness sounds like. “The purpose of the program is not to turn all students into poets,” says Judith Wray, “but to give them an excited feeling and appreciation for the way language works. As it stands now, our language is without magic, full of empty rhetoric.”

The program is aimed at teachers as well. They participate regularly in workshops or seminars designed to reintroduce them to the creative arts as practiced by professionals in the field. In a poetry workshop, they explore the creative process from the inside out through writing exercises and language games designed by the poet. A newly organized “master poet’s project” will eventually train apprentices to communicate language more effectively in the classroom. In addition, program grants for filmmaking enabled two high school instructors to study recently at the Center for Understanding Media in New York. Both have established innovative courses in their respective schools, and are being coun-



seled by Stan Brakhage, one of the country's leading experimental filmmakers. The Artists-in-Schools Program has also launched a film workshop in conjunction with the University of Denver's Mass Communications Department. Eighteen teachers from all parts of the state were admitted the first go-around, and there's a waiting list twice that long.

All of this activity, however, doesn't offer a true measure of the effectiveness of the program—either in Colorado or the nation as a whole. There are too many intangibles, and the concept is still in its infancy. The closest one can come to an evaluation is simply to observe firsthand, or to question the students themselves.

In one such questionnaire filed anonymously by youngsters in the poetry program, 85 per cent liked both the project and the poet but lamented the fact, says Judith Wray, that the artist didn't remain longer in the school. Another recurring comment probably reveals more about the status of the Old Order than the success of the New. "They have said again and again that they like the poet," says Dr. Wray, "because he talks to them like a friend. . . . and not like a teacher."

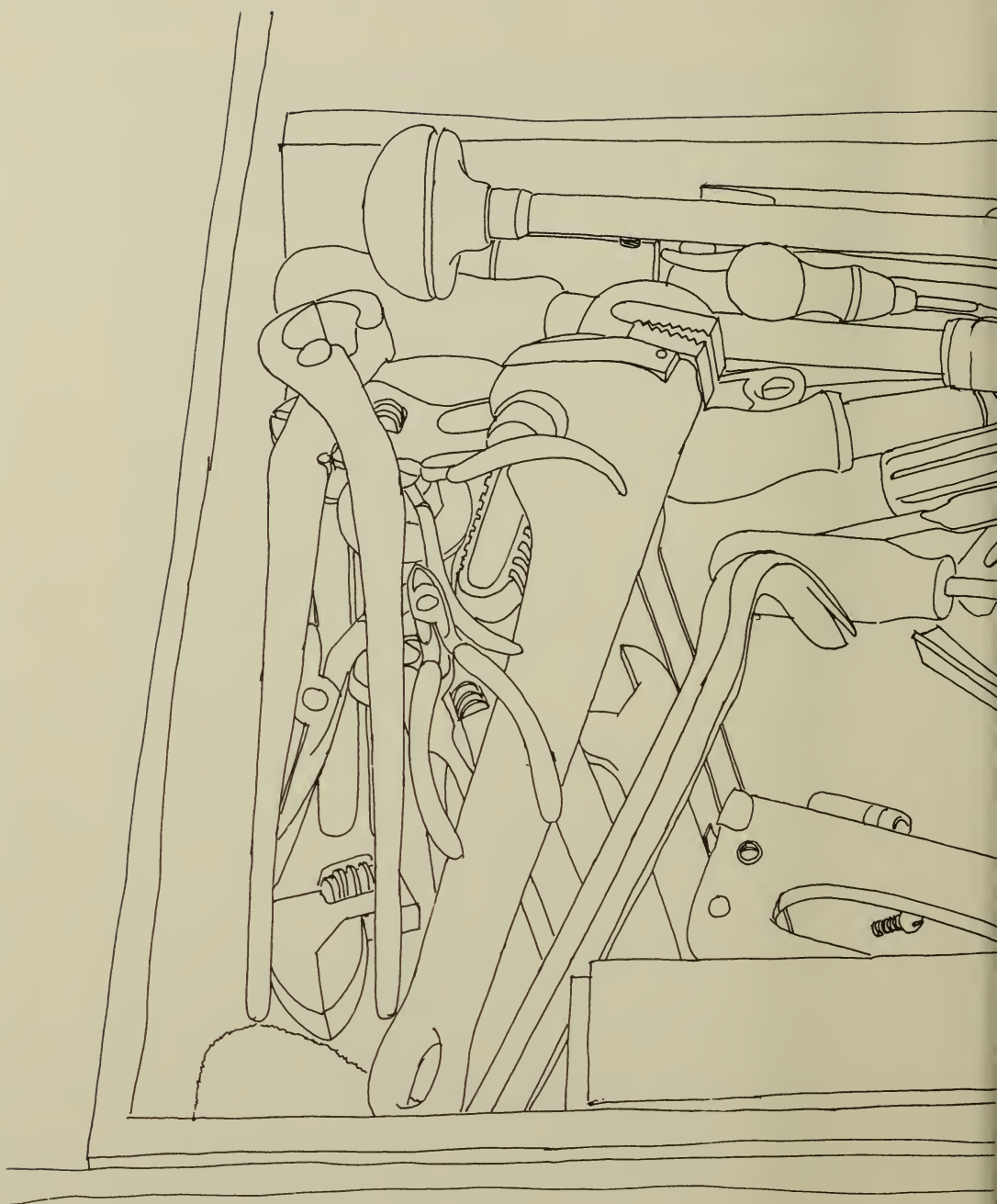
#### INSTRUCTIONS FOR A PANTOMIME

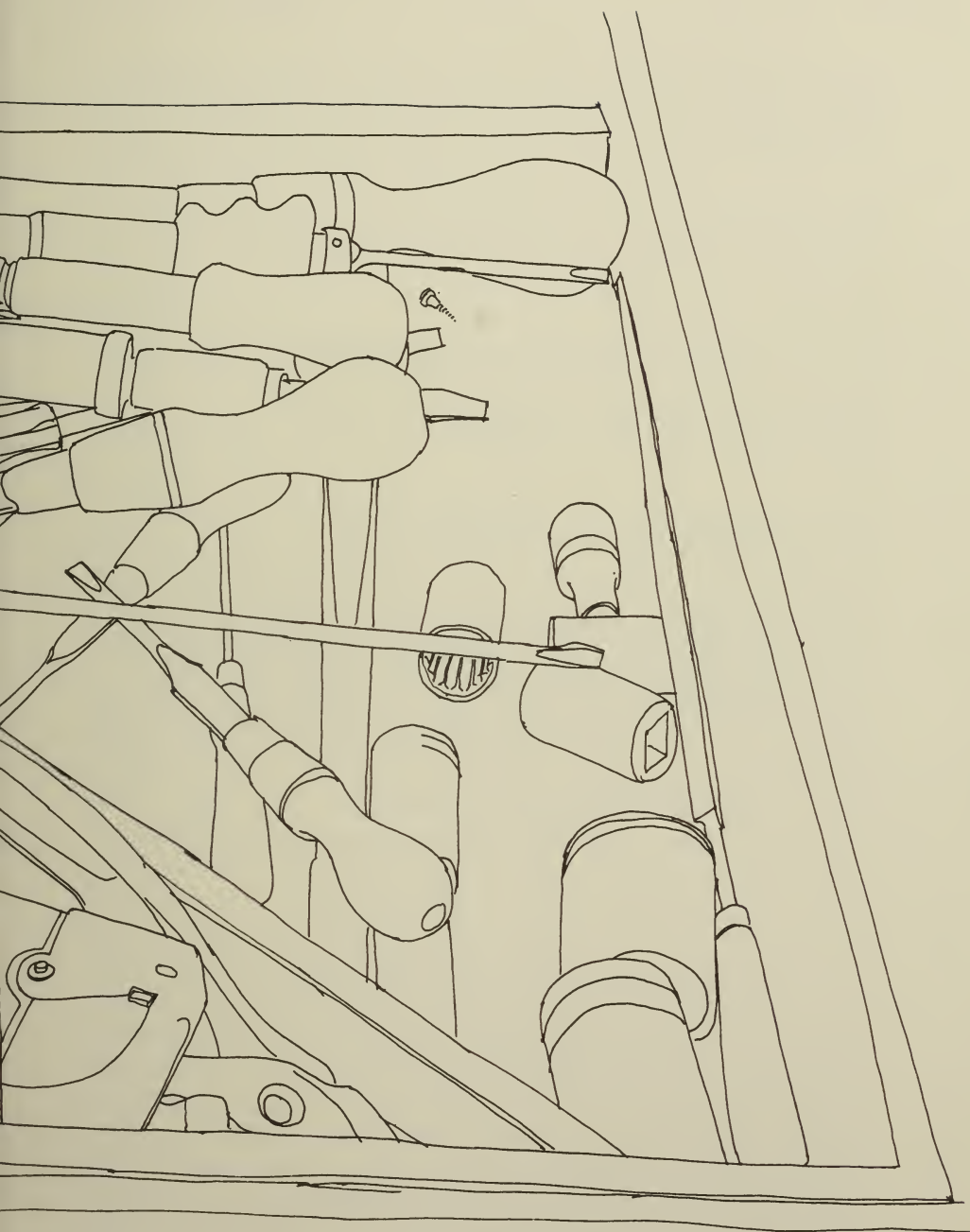
I want you to dig the words  
out of your mouth, melt them  
down to an ingot, that most  
compact of solids,

and holding that oblong sound  
in your hand, let it be hurled  
of its own will out and against  
the wall of silence

that blocks you from your breathless  
audience. Now again, this time  
without words  
that's better

JOHN RIDLAND





# A Sense of Affection

*A portrait of the Athenian School  
in Danville, California*

JOHN A. B. FAGGI, JR.

To create a new society, each one of us has to be a true teacher, which means that we have to be both the pupil and the master; we have to educate ourselves.

J. Krishnamurti, *Education and the Significance of Life*

Without Contraries is no progression.

William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

I first visited the Athenian School over a year and a half ago, in March when the hills shone green. Thinking back on my week as a “prospective teacher,” I smile at how that school in California—no, to be fair, how my enthusiasm for that school—beguiled me. Beguiled, because I didn’t see the traumas and complexities of the students’ personal lives (I know about them now), the indecision of the faculty (I participate in that), and the long winter rains which are slowly turning the hills March-green (and also mud lying our spirits). I was taken in by all the informality,



humaneness, joy, by the spirit of youth. I still am. But I hope I have perspective enough to tell you honestly about some of the things we do well and some of the things we don't do well. A few glimpses, from my vantage point, of Athenian.

Although the poet-artist William Blake said, "The tygers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction," he also said: "Energy is the only life, and is from the Body; and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy." So we need them both. The tygers of joy, exuberance, unchained energy. The horses of hard work, sweat, guts, and discipline. And when we have them both, we are at our best—in those moments of magical, unspoken communion, when a secret chemistry unites joy and discipline into creative work.

Moments during Outward Bound. For several years most juniors have spent the first three weeks before the opening of school on a modified Outward Bound course in the Sierras. This year eight of us on the faculty joined the eleventh grade: two as instructors of student patrols and six as members of a separate faculty patrol. For me, and the other five in our group, it remains an experience beyond words. Perhaps all one might say is that what the kids did (had to do) we did (had to do). We hiked over 100 miles during the three weeks, we got blisters (or some of us did), got lost at night (or I thought we did), and almost got over our vertigo. We found our limitations and went beyond them. We stood face to face with our own competitiveness, bile, anxiety, fear. But the six of us came away with a renewed sense of wonder at the natural world, and perhaps more important, a sense of renewed confidence in our abilities to live harmoniously in that world and amongst ourselves.

On the night of September ninth we got back from the Sierras, lean and tan, welcomed by the whole school. We were home, but by no means had we brought back all of ourselves from the mountains. During a faculty meeting ten days later the six of us tried to share our experiences; we tried to communicate, or reveal, what it was like. English Department Chairman Tom Swope talked about how there was "no imposition of unnecessary

rules,” only “the need to sustain daily tasks,” often under anxiety. He told us about being lost for a time on Mt. Lyle; I remembered as he spoke my own panic (and anger) as I crunched up an ice field with no Tom or Ken in sight. And the total exhaustion of climbing Conness, when, after every move, there was another more difficult. But we made it, “invigorated,” as Tom said, “by the cleanness of our exertion.”

Linda Grantham, our dance teacher, talked about that absolute reality, too, and how we learned to communicate without words. She and the other two women, French teacher Elisa Horne and chemistry teacher Ruth Nuckolls, went off alone for the middle section of the trip, returning to the men as good or better at starting fires, putting up shelters—as good as we were at getting along in the mountains. Elisa, who had never slept outside before the trip, talked about the basic, simple things: cooking, eating, sleeping, walking, for once looking at the world. And drama teacher Ken Grantham. He didn’t say much, just that he didn’t feel “rattled” the way a teacher usually does after the first week of school.

Ruth talked about the experience of facing problems and solving them. Problems in a chemistry experiment or on a three-day solo. I remember that time most clearly. Cold, hunger, boredom, anxiety, frustration, loneliness. Also a chance to search for obsidian arrowheads, to have a staring contest with a camouflaged frog, to watch the sun rise and set, to experience the twilight, what Castaneda’s Don Juan calls “the crack between the two worlds,” a chance to sit and do nothing. An unpleasant endurance test? Not so. Having lived simply for over two weeks, we had all the skills to be without food or companionship for seventy hours and enjoy it. That, to me, is creativity: the craft of adapting to new environments, whether they be the intellectual spaces of mathematics or the physical realms of glacial lakes.

It wasn’t all easy or fun, but we did it. That’s all that matters. We tried to tell the faculty what it was like and we failed. Or words did. Perhaps we defiled the experience by talking about it. How could our colleagues have known what it was like? Why

didn't we predict those embarrassed silences after each of us spoke, passionately and honestly—still without our civilized masks? Perhaps, instead of talking, we should have planned *and* carried out an Outward Bound experience for the whole faculty.

### *come disguised and cover your tracks*

We did accomplish something, though, something which may suggest a different direction for the school: a new department, christened the Department of Experimental Education by Chairman Swope. He has since been the catalyst for our planning and for our sense of humor. His first directive concludes: "One last word. Perhaps our thinking will become inspired if we consider ourselves to be members of a cabal. Thus, for Wednesday, please come disguised and cover your tracks." From the beginning our goal has been to persuade the same benefactor who has funded our Field Biology program to help us integrate non-academic experiences into the humanities curriculum. Students have come to the last two meetings, and they will join us in presenting the whole community with a plan for three-week "experiences" off campus or intensive, school-based classes of the same length, hopefully after Spring Vacation in April. Either the off-campus projects or the in-depth classes would serve as test grounds for a completely new "block" system now used effectively by a number of schools and colleges, among them Colorado College, The Gill School in New Jersey, The Cambridge School in Weston, Massachusetts, and The Urban School of San Francisco.

To capture the spirit of this Department of Experimental Education and to set forth some of our ideas, I quote from Tom Swope's statement of October tenth to Headmaster David Murray and Founder-Director Dyke Brown:

Last, all of the participants were guided by a deep belief in the limitations and inhibitions imposed by a strictly classroom approach to education. The ideas we came up with are a way to enliven the classroom, not to avoid it entirely. We want to

use it as the sanctuary it is: to discuss questions, to be rational, to be deliberate. But we don't want to be restricted by it. We want our students (and faculty) to make a more vital investment in their own learning, one that would involve *all* of them, physically and mentally.

It should also be mentioned that most of these ideas (for projects) use California. The location of The Athenian School is one of its assets. Historically, however, we have not exploited the possibilities. For many of the things we do we might as well be in Yonkers, New York.

*One of the most valuable contributions of an experimental segment is the impact it makes on a student's self-esteem. . . .* We want by the experience we devise to show the student he can alter his surroundings to his advantage, that he can depend on himself for solutions.

What are some of these experiences? Biology teacher Pat Billig and I prepare our "Coast Walk" for the scrutiny of the group. Briefly, it will be "an interdisciplinary study of the Northern California (Mendocino) coastal environment, integrating two distinct perspectives: the poet and scientist." We, ten students and two teachers, plan to walk thirty or forty miles down the Mattole River and south along the shore, camping, interpreting topo maps, identifying edible plants and animals, observing (keenly), writing scientific responses and impressionistic prose in a journal, and grappling with the elements of a poem. We will read, among other things, *Between Pacific Tides*, Thoreau, Eisley, and poems by Jeffers, Roethke, and Bly.

The next step for the department is a trip to The Urban School to see how their block system works. Bob Wilder of Urban has sent us a summary of *Intensive Courses—A Research Need*, from which I quote:

. . . If a student's commitment, decision-making, and community are important, then the use of intensive courses should be examined. . . . Secondary school can provide a basis for research if they break out of their pattern.



I wonder if we will.

We make attempts at "commitment, decision-making, and community." Individual students have organized, and continue to coordinate, yoga, judo, fencing, and even tap-dancing. Volunteer head-waiters run tablewaiting and dishwashing, and all the kids participate. This program has been more effectively supervised by students than by faculty members, as it was last year. Custodians do not clean the dormitories for the kids; if the cleaning gets done, students do it. They also do a lot of the maintenance work around the campus: painting, planting grass where there had never been any, putting in a sprinkler system to keep that grass growing in the summer. And members of the student-faculty Central Committee are developing a plan for student management of the school—everything from landscaping to rule enforcement. The plan awaits realization; the Central Committee and all of us have to make it work.

One way teachers have a hand in doing is through field trips. Pat Billig has led her Field Biology group to Yosemite, Point Reyes National Seashore, the Sacramento Bird Refuge, Mt. Lassen, and Death Valley. Miles Becker has taken his Mountaineering class camping, hiking, and rock-climbing in the Sierras; he has scheduled several ski-touring expeditions this winter. Pat Sakai and her "Third World Experience" seminar have visited the Chinese city of Locke on the Sacramento River Delta, as well as the ethnic sections of San Francisco. And Tom Swope has recently gone with his Journalism seminar to Alcatraz; the trip has supplemented its work with the reading of Jessica Mitford's *Kind and Usual Punishment* and has suggested topics for writing on the uses and misuses of the penal system.

To encourage this kind of experimental learning, and also independent work, the English Department has begun this fall a tutorial program designed for upperclassmen we thought could work on their own. Four students join one or two faculty members in Film Criticism, Children's Literature, Walking and Running, Science Fiction, and Explorations in Consciousness. Besides meeting weekly for discussions, experiences, or outings, the tutorials

may do something for the school community. The Walkers and Runners, for instance, are organizing an all-school walking marathon to take place sometime in mid-January. Neither faculty nor students always have the energy for the tutorials; often they become our last priority. But they suggest a beginning. At least there is the opportunity for a student to “depend on himself for solutions.”

For the average student at this school reality is not independent work, but rather four of five classes, five days a week. On Tuesday, November 13th I set out to be a student; I played hooky and visited classes. At 8:45 seventeen tenth and eleventh graders and I met Munzer Affi, Chairman of the Math Department. I marvelled at Munzer’s teaching, how he browbeat, cajoled, and tricked his students into solving geometry theorems. He told bad jokes.

Later, he said sternly: “I’m not interested in making hypothetical solutions prior to solving the problem.” He didn’t and they, the kids themselves, solved that and other problems. With no time to wonder if the silent ones really understood, I was whisked out of the class at 9:25. Weeks later I can still see Affi’s protean face in front of the board, leering, frowning, harumphing, lighting up in that broad, toothy grin.

After Morning Meeting, an informal, student-initiated daily assembly, I visited Swope’s English II, a group of sophomores and juniors diverse in ability and interest. I looked around and noticed the seating arrangement. Seven or eight kids sitting around the table and two or three slumped on a day bed against the far wall; they were dwarfed by the floor-to-ceiling bookcases behind them. All waiting for something to happen. I sensed that Tom wasn’t in the mood for this passivity, this reluctance to tackle the work of creating a dictionary of slang. The teacher paced back and forth, occasionally scrawling some pithy phrase on the board (the “visceral authenticity” of slang). The students sat; a few spoke well and vitally, a few mumbled, others said nothing. The class may or may not have been “bad,” but that’s not the point here. The point is this: learning becomes an exercise in restlessness

and frustration for some. And even the most skillful teachers and the most committed students have these classes, these days.

Fourth period. I barged in on Tom Phillips's English I class. They were working on leads, something I knew a little about. Tom said, in passing, "What I'm doing, as I've often done in this class, is to think on my feet." He did it well, and the kids, a bright group of ninth-graders, helped make the transitions. With no time to talk with Tom about the class, I hustled out the door at 11:35, making a note to find out what those ten ways to develop a paragraph really were. I still haven't.

### *upper-middle-class ghetto*

American history with Zuckerman. He had been invaded by six guests: Dyke Brown and an impressive-looking man from the Ford Foundation, two students and a student teacher from a nearby high school, and Faggi, who had to stand in the back since there were no more chairs. Tension came down in sheets. Ron used it to his advantage, as he spoke with characteristic flare and wit about urbanization. The kids said little until our two distinguished guests had left. Then they burst forth with jokes, yawns, and stretches. The teacher ended the class saying that The Athenian School, which was supposed to be a refuge from the cultural death of the suburbs, had now become its own ghetto. I wondered if anyone made a note of that. Do we ever talk about such painful subjects—this school as upper-middle class ghetto?

A hasty lunch and then over the hill to Elisa Horne's French IV. The room didn't look like a classroom; students and teacher sat on a couch and on the floor. They were doing a grammar review of the subjunctive. An atmosphere relaxed but not sloppy, business-like but not dull. And, although it was a grammar class, Elisa allowed digressions, productive because always in French. Very smooth. I did notice one girl over in the corner, though, who looked puzzled. Did she really understand what was going on? She might never be sure, since she was already late for her next class. So was I.

A few minutes after 2:00: Ken's double period of drama. The class was less than a week away from performing Brendan Behan's *The Hostage*. The kids looked tired and cranky, as they sprawled on couches, on sections of the partially-built set, and on each other. They listened sleepily to reports about Sean O'Casey and the Irish Rebellion of 1916. Confusion, then annoyance. One girl thought she was scheduled to give her report that day, but there wouldn't be time. Ken held on to his patience and read his notes on the actors. Speaking to each student with amiable directness, he criticized their characterizations, but he didn't hack away at their self-esteem. My day as a student ended as the drama class trudged up the hill in the rain to listen to some Irish ballads in the Commons.

On that Tuesday I saw how the concurrent class system fragments a student, pulling him in four, five, even six directions. It exhausts him through that fragmentation. And it may punish students, like those in drama, who try to pursue one interest in depth. Though they work four, six, eight hours a day on a production, they still have history, math, Spanish, chemistry: homework, papers, tests. The block system is no panacea, but at least it offers the chance for flexibility, for concentration, and for more creative work.

The following Sunday the school witnessed *The Hostage*. What was unique about the production? First, director Grantham knew his actors so well that he could, in one case, let one of them flounder up until three days before the dress rehearsal when he worked with her intensely. She therefore "found" the character at the time of the performance, not peaking too soon. Second, as a member of the audience and also one who knew these particular kids well, I was struck by the wonderful spirit during the whole play, a spirit maintained through the breaking of the set and still evident now, weeks later. But I was most impressed with how many faculty members were involved with the students: Ken Grantham as director, math teacher Lester Henderson as Danny the Piano Player, dorm head Chuck Woodburn as the Drunken Russian Sailor, Linda Grantham as choreographer and



coach of the Irish jig, Admissions Director and history teacher John Galloway as guitarist accompanying "The Patriot Game," a song preceding the curtain call, and finally Tom Swope as photographer during rehearsals. At the cast party Tom presented all the actors and the director with mounted prints, and Ron presented Ken with a Zuckermanian speech and a bottle of Irish Mist.

This kind of group effort characterizes the school at its best. People work hard together; people help each other out. When I walked into my classroom one Monday morning wondering what I would do in class, there they were on the wall: Swope's photographs of the Sierras and one each of Grantham and Faggi right after solo. These faces would have to inspire writing. They did. Later that morning I asked both my tenth grade English sections to write something about either of the two faces, pretending they had never seen them before. After the usual groans and protests, some began. Others didn't know how, so I suggested that they start each sentence with "He looks like . . . ." I read through the creations that night, underlining parts that struck me as imaginative or funny. Then it occurred to me to excerpt the best lines and combine them in a verbal collage, a mosaic of words. A poem? Here is a shortened version of "Ode to Kenny":

He looks like he has the devil in him; he's out to get us.

He looks like a very friendly vampire.

He looks like a little imp, a leprechaun, like he has a big bruise to take care of him.

He looks like a court jester watching a very sexy unmarried princess.

He looks as if he could dance the Russian folk dance with ease and enjoyment, like he's just finished dancing with a bottle of wine in his gut.

He looks like a starving chipmunk.

He looks content, kind, and hungry.

Simply happy.

These lines may not be great stuff; our dramatic reading of them the next day in Morning Meeting may not have been a great performance. But we did it. Three teachers and twenty students

were involved in a creative process. And that process, not the product, matters most.

A few weeks later, when I needed a little transition in my Romantic Spirit in Literature seminar, there he was: Zuckerman to deliver a scholarly lecture on Percival Throttlebottom, the seventh and most brilliant of the English Romantic poets. And it isn't just the teachers who help out. My Writing Workshop students once waited thirty minutes for me to arrive, victim of a temperamental old VW. Knowing their teachers as well as they do, the kids often show us remarkable loyalty. We are, in fact, whole human beings to these kids. Not just "the math teacher" or the "soccer coach," but Munzer Affi, the multifaceted person. And they, I hope, are whole human beings to us, not just "students" or "adolescents".

### *what is all this lethargy?*

Humaneness. Joy. Youth.

Alexis Zorba, the archtypical Free Spirit, once said: "Sea, women, wine and hard work! Throwing yourself headlong into your work, into wine, and love and never being afraid of either God or devil . . . that's what youth is."<sup>1</sup> If that's true, what is all this lethargy, this apathy that we see in our students (and in ourselves)? How many classes have we sighed our way through, hoping the next day would recover the lost fountain of youth and vitality? Admissions Director John Galloway was right when he quipped: "It's interesting how our students have forecast the Energy Crisis in their own work." Do they have the endurance for the block system? Do we? Or will our enthusiasm wane as did last year's yoga group: from twenty-five in the fall to half a dozen in the late spring? Do we, teachers and students, have the doggedness to finish a five or six-week intensive course? And, more important, does the school have the courage to try?

Who are we anyway? This small, liberal-progressive, coeduca-

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<sup>1</sup>Nikos Kazantzakis, *Zorba the Greek*, p. 264.

tional boarding school in California? Are we a competitive prep school dedicated to academic excellence and the pursuit of degrees? Or are we a free-wheeling, experimental school dedicated to new ideas, change, and visions of the future? We might be many things. We might continue to offer a tough, liberal arts program which would satisfy the requirements of the most prestigious colleges in the country. We might also offer an alternative program (also tough) in the arts. If we really believe that painting, sculpture, graphics, crafts, music, drama, and dance are important, not just frills for the elite, then we ought to build our program into an alternative for talented kids who are committed to early specialization. And what about those young people who don't want to go to college at all, who aren't sure, who may be bright, hard-working, even "good" students—where do they fit in? Do institutions have a monopoly on living for the fourteen to eighteen-year-old?

And speaking of living. Why is it that we go to school for all these years and spend so much time studying math, English, history, and science and so little time learning about sex, love, marriage, parenthood, old age, and death? Not to mention desire, fear, anxiety, loneliness. (What is behind "all this lethargy"?) Shouldn't these, the practicalities of living, be taught and seriously considered in an effort to find out who we really are? The three Men's Groups and four Women's Groups move in this direction. Something significant is going on in those weekly meetings. Some confrontation with actual problems that the kids, and all of us, face every day.

We are a school; we should not give up academic learning. By opening up the curriculum to the arts and the affective domain, we will strengthen our intellectual program. But we should understand that no new system will solve the problems we have now. They are better dealt with before we move into a system requiring more intensity and more emotional stamina. We are presently caught in what Zuckerman calls "the liberal dilemma," that is, we are good at pointing toward the horizon, but we can't always set boundaries. We need to be able to say no, that a project

seems too ambitious, or not ambitious enough. We need to observe the exploitation syndrome: teachers expecting the impossible from students, then wondering why they give up; students using close friendships against teachers to avoid deadlines, to do the minimum.

And can we watch the images; are they irrevocably formed? One teacher as the entertainer, the magician with words, expressions, gestures who can spellbind a class. When he urges discussion, they have nothing to say, they don't listen to the speaker, or they stifle good talk with personal antagonism. Another teacher as the careful listener who lets every student finish his or her point, no matter how fatuous or half-baked. When he wants to lecture, they snap on their pained expressions; when he gets angry, they wonder: "What's wrong with — today?"

And the kids suffer more than we do, stereotyped bright or dull by their teachers, stereotyped leader or follower, tragic figure or clown by their peers. Can we smash those images?

Can we observe how we indulge ourselves in our community, how we persuade ourselves of our contentment with the school or content ourselves with our cynical condemnation of it? We are quick to praise Athenian to outsiders who come to visit, equally quick to criticize the place after they leave. This is one kind of self-indulgence. Another stems from the wealthy backgrounds of most of our students. They are used to parents who provide, teachers who entertain, counselors who listen. Who will entertain them or listen to them in college or out in the world? Can we be friends with our students without nurturing their emotional dependence on us? Or does all this sympathy and all this freedom and all this joy have us in a strangle hold?

I have one more question. Who is the man whose photograph hangs above the stairs leading up to the administrative offices in our Main Hall? He is that same Kurt Hahn who founded Gordonstoun and Outward Bound and who spoke at our Founding Day eight years ago. Imagine him, in his speech, referring to us as a school that would pursue the Outward Bound goals, which are, as I understand them, physical fitness, initiative and self-



sufficiency, practical problem-solving, responsibility to the community, and compassion for the individual. Are we pursuing these goals? We are trying to with the idea of student management, the work program, dorm clean-up, tablewaiting and dishwashing, and the Mountaineering class. Some of these efforts die, though, or they need to be saved constantly from death. Waiters don't show up for meals, the dorms get dirtier, jobs around campus get done through the stalwart efforts of the same few. Compassion is here, sometimes initiative. But fitness, responsibility, community: are these just ideals or do they actually exist in our lives?

I should be careful of these Mediterranean outbursts. We fail so obviously because we often seem so close to success. And we do succeed. We do experience those moments when the tygers of joyous energy and the horses of discipline work together. When a fifteen-year-old girl reveals her idea of Romanticism, and a part of herself, by dancing that idea into physical reality. When a sixteen-year-old boy runs seven miles through the fields and woods of Yosemite with feet badly blistered and knees shot. Or when a teacher, a man in his fifties, joins two other teachers and three students to tell how, for months, he awoke in the night to write down his dreams.

Moments of creative work.

### *room to move*

An educational space. We have achieved what one junior calls "room to move," we can plan *and* act without the intervention of alumni (our eldest are not yet twenty-five) or trustees (ours seem benevolent). And we can talk with each other as human beings. Humaneness and joy are important; we find them on the pages of a student journal:

. . . You can't dismiss someone with "Oh yeah—we say hi when we walk by each other and all that"—nothing is that elementary. There's so much more— not all conscious, spoken, obvious communication, but the way someone is and affects the air around

him—the sense people get of each other, the smell and the feel, the awareness and the walls. . . . There are so many contributors to every moment.

“The way someone affects the air around him,” the presence of an individual: one thing we do well is to recognize that presence. Each person does matter here; each is allowed, encouraged to be himself.

Then there is the presence of a particular person who describes herself, and one face of Athenian, better than I can:

And how happy I am in my rushes of life! I don't spend my nights in work deploring, I work panic quick somehow nonchalant during the morning—each (subject) before its own class. I get it done, I get behind, I catch up, I care, I don't, I forget and remember laugh and cry out angry because I don't understand the geometry and now I'm laughing because I do . . . . I feel as if everyone will disown me because I can't stop

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laughing and just running ahead if they won't keep up—or, for that, falling back if they go too fast for me to see. My moods are like this/that/this/that so no one sees and all of a sudden I stop and am bewildered until I'm thrown back in again where I can't stay unhappy by myself.

The pure ebullience, the unspoilt honesty of these words transmute them into spirit, the spirit of the best things that we do and the best people that we are at this small school in California.

It's raining hard on the library roof and out on the hills. For these hills and The Athenian School and the people here, in spite of that "gouging paralytic, exhaustive, exuberant, satisfied, hopeless, frustrated, slap-happy fatigue,"<sup>1</sup> I feel gratitude, and most of all, "a sense of affection."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>B. A. Stark in her *Journal*.

<sup>2</sup>J. Krishnamurti, *Education and the Significance of Life*, p. 94.

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# Gainesville Revisited

*The humanities is an intangible apple*

EDWARD B. TASCH

We can polish it and leave it on a teacherly desk. We can core it. We can bite off more than we can chew. If we are Wallace Stevens, we may conceive the poetry of an apple sitting on a green cloth. We can peel it to view what lies beneath the skin—being careful, of course, to keep the skin in one piece. And we can coin aphoristic analogies: Apples are for Eating, Intangible Apples are for Evaluating. The product of a successful evaluation of the Humanities, or of a specific curricular attempt to implement the Humanities, is a spirally coil of apple skin—peeled as carefully as possible and lying collapsed asymmetrical next to the white inner apple.

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Five years ago, Gainesville High School in Gainesville, Georgia, invited a team organized by the National Humanities Faculty to assist them with the curricular revision accompanying the school's transition from an all-white, college oriented high school to a racially integrated one. The primary task of the National Humanities Faculty was to help Gainesville High re-evaluate and revitalize its Humanities program in order to facilitate a cross-cultural interchange that could underpin the institution's racial reorganiza-



tion. The four members of the NHF team were professors from Berkeley, Harvard, Massachusetts College of Art in Boston and Stanford.

The Gainesville file at the NHF's Concord, Massachusetts, office is a thick one; it is full of correspondences, revised curricular statements and evaluations. It includes a videotape of the NHF visit one year after the project's inception, at which time they held a conference with the faculty of the school and surrounding high schools to assess the impact of the Humanities program that had been initiated. The feedback was extremely positive (as has been subsequent feedback). The members of the NHF involved were enthusiastic, the students interviewed interested and appreciative, the school faculty invigorated, optimistic, and proud of their involvement in the enterprise. But the problems inherent to the task were admittedly formidable, especially in light of the essential ambiguities of the Humanities as a discipline or group of disciplines or cross-breeding of disciplines. How can we understand the interdependence of method and content in the teaching of the Humanities, the balance between the transmission of cultural heritage and an equality of cultural opportunity and relevance? If the Humanities themselves are not easily defined, how can they be implemented or evaluated?

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The Gainesville Holiday Inn. Over-educated, commissioned, commenting to myself on the newness of my circumstances and the nature of my enterprise, and committing plagiarism on my unwritten article at every turn, I turned freely from the clerk to the clock, put my jacket label down over my arm, picked up my suitcase, and headed for it. A few back streets took me by a closed Feed and Grain Company, a lumber yard, and several small, dirty-white houses. The Holiday Inn sat pinned to Route 13 by a yellow-white night neon star, a flagpole and a fountain in concrete.

Reservations had reserved for me room 308. It was a few minutes past five. I put my suitcase and jacket on the bed, placed

an apple from my jacket pocket on the desk, looked up the number of the office of the Superintendent of Schools and had a brief conversation with a secretary who respectfully told me that Mr. Blakeney was expecting me, but he had just left the office for the day.

Stranded, branded: “Mr. Tay-ush, of the National Humanities Faculty.” I pulled up my dad’s not-very-old, over-the-calf length, sheer, black, executive socks and let my mind fall down about my ankles. I turned on the TV and visited the head. Monday night in Gainesville. Shall I write a poem about sense of place? Jot a Holiday Inn postcard or two? Review my NHF stuff? What kind of evaluation was this to be? At Andover, I would be between the gym and dinner, in front of my stereo and a set of Competence papers. Marking. Time? A year at a. Hours passed. To eat. Free room and board. Now here too. Payed for. Preposed: for me to write it off, down and up. Critically, with due scepticism, diffracted in colorful words through Gainesville High School. Inferior monologue. To documented dialogue. Interpret faithfully. Open your eyes. Your EARS.

The phone rang.

“Hello. Mr. Tay-ush? This is Revis Blakeney. I’m terribly sorry that I missed you earlier, but I had an important meeting of the Church Deacons this afternoon. I was hoping you might arrive sooner. Did you arrive all right?”

“Oh, no problem. I got in just after five and your secretary told me I just missed you. The bus ride from Atlanta took longer than I had expected.” Did he see me as a sophisticated, tweeded thirty-five? Did I see him as a grey-haired local administrator?

“Well, I look forward to seeing you first thing in the morning. Did you rent a car in Gainesville?”

Oops. First mistake. “No. I wanted to keep my expenses down.” Lame excuse. What kind of official visitor, guest of the Superintendent of Schools, doesn’t think to rent a car?

“I’ll send a car to pick you up then. What time is good for you. Sometime around 8:00? I thought we could spend some time in my office in the morning to give you a chance to tell me just what

it is you would like from me and what your plans and questions are." Sending a car? This is it. What *do* I want from him?

"That sounds fine. 8:00 then?"

"Good. I'll see you in the morning. I hope your first night in Gainesville is a comfortable one. Goodnight, sir."

"Goodnight, Mr. Blakeney. Thanks for calling. Goodnight," I said, looking blankly to the TV and kicking myself with an involuntary twinge of Southern accent on the "night."

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The curricular revisions that came out of the NHF visits to Gainesville principally involved the Social Studies and English departments, although several across the board changes—the move to a semester system, for example—affected the school as a whole. Generally, the attempt to foster cross-cultural interchange and to bolster the Humanities was translated into an inter-disciplinary coordination of Social Studies and English and the formation of new inter-disciplinary courses that were designed to deal directly with two of the essential concerns of the NHF: the move from a chronological, categorical approach to a more flexible, thematic one, and the incorporation of real and relevant issues of student life into the classroom. The two new courses were entitled Humanities and Contemporary Issues. Within the existing Social Studies/English framework, course material was reorganized around complementary historical and literary themes, and simplistic single textbook methodology was exploded with the introduction of a multiple text, multi-media approach. Two classes that I visited, Contemporary Issues and English, exemplified the difficulties inherent to the NHF innovations at Gainesville.

Contemporary Issues, as the name suggests, attacked what seem to be generally relevant topics: sex, drugs and poverty. What better way to encourage responsible, real discourse between students and teachers than to deal with issues that are real for them? But the Contemporary Issues classes I attended failed not only to engage students in dialogue but also to explore or

foster exploration of the issues. Rather than an evocation of student evaluation of the issues and their relation to them, the class became an outdated advertisement for an old package of values. The values in this case: “Drugs Are Bad,” in the form of a two part slide show that pictured an innocent student victimized by his addiction to marijuana. The film was, as far as I am concerned, a whitewash of a complex problem; it was clear, at least, that it did not address the students of this class in any substantive manner. The class was a mostly black tenth-grade section and the boys in the film were white, V-neck sweatered caricatures, for instance. As the slides advanced, one of the more precocious readers read the subtitles: “The unsuspecting student is offered a reefer by a drug dealer.” He stumbled on the word “reefer,” mis-reading it “referee,” and for the remainder of the class the mistake became a good joke.

“Hey, look at the size of that referee! Looks like the one I smoked last night.”

The teacher’s primary function during all this was helping with the reading of the subtitles and pointing out details on the slides. She did not attempt to cover up her own lack of experience, but more importantly she made no effort to tap the experience of the students or to investigate possible discrepancies between student knowledge about drugs and the official dictum of the film. As a result, student drug experience, fear, questions, and convictions were never articulated, but found expression in energetic and painfully superficial quibbling and gaming. When comically confronted by a student asking if she would like to see a referee, she could only say no.

Even this potentially most relevant of subjects was deadened by the process of dealing with it in class. Students are used to considering drugs and related issues as strictly out-of-school concerns. In a sense, they are antithetical to school; they constitute the students’ refuge outside academics and school. When school threatens, it can be cast aside guiltlessly in favor of “*the world*.” Bringing this realm of experience into the classroom is subtly and fundamentally threatening to the student; it demands that he



give over his ‘sacred,’ private domain into the secular classroom, that he integrate and incorporate school into ‘the rest of his life.’ When the attempt at such delicate and difficult in-class integration fails, it comes off as an attempt at cooptation that automatically turns students away.

The goal, then, of humane discourse, of relevance, or encouraging the student to bring his outside experiences with him into class, may not be achieved most easily by making contemporary issues the subject of class scrutiny. Like a dim star and like the sun (!!), relevance, dialogue, humanity is not best approached or perceived head on. They are not qualities that can be easily taught in the classroom and so must not be confused with teachable quantities and teaching techniques. This is what Ivan Illich is about when he argues for the disassociation of “the acquisition of skills from ‘humane’ education, which the schools package together. “Whether or not we agree with Illich’s specific dichotomy between “skill drill” and “other kinds of learning,” it seems clear that Humanities oriented curricula, and in this case the Contemporary Issues course at Gainesville, do tend to confuse certain classroom ‘teachables’ and ‘unteachables.’

The Contemporary Issues classes I observed were, then, an archetype of the confusion between teaching relevant subject matter and teaching values. It is not enough to address matters that would seem to be clearly and necessarily contemporary and of concern to students. Classroom technique and procedure may not be appropriate to certain kinds of learning, and if this is so, we must either open the classroom up to include these learning experiences or more carefully extricate those avenues of learning that are mistakenly entangled in the classroom and provide for them a more healthy environment.

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The Pledge of Allegiance took me by surprise and I performed it uncomfortably and self-consciously. The luncheon that followed went well, except for the forced conversation I carried on with

a former high school teacher who insisted on giving me his comments on various educational matters. In one corner of the room, to the right of the dais, a woman softly plunked out popular songs (*What's It All About Alfie?*) on an old, upright piano, keeping her back straight and her head straight ahead on the sheet music.

As we neared the end of the meal, the President of the chapter stepped to the podium and announced his brief agenda: introduction of guests, awarding of this month's high school Key Club honors, a guest speaker on the Mormon Faith and a film, and a very brief meeting of the Spiritual Aims Committee at the luncheon's conclusion.

An hour later, Mr. Blakeney held the door for me as I politely and incredulously maneuvered out through the plain, main entrance of the Dixie Hunt Hotel in downtown Gainesville. I was engaged in conversation by a young, intelligent, energetic businessman in yellow-tinted sunglasses, who was interested in my visit there and my job at Andover. After he left, I turned to Mr. Blakeney and commented, "Well, Mr. Blakeney, that sure was an interesting meeting." My mind was spinning. 'A lunch with some of the community leaders,' he had termed it. 'The leaders of tomorrow,' the presentation of awards had read. Let's give them a hand. They deserve it. I pledged allegiance. A Gainesville High student is President of the International Key Club. The apple of everyone's eye. The Mormons are coming to Gainesville. *Have they set their sights high?* A better Gainesville by being good neighbors and good citizens. Thirty minutes of PR footage. What's a Spiritual Aims Committee? Pick up your free Book of Mormon on your way out. Take off your name tags. I was the personal, out-of-state guest of a former Kiwanis President. He turned to me, smiling, and said slowly, "Thank you. I'm glad you enjoyed it."

We got into his new Oldsmobile, and he gave me an unhurried tour of Gainesville. County Court House. The whole town got blown away by a tornado in the thirties. So and so, an ex-attorney, crossing the street by the bank. The First Baptist Church. The Blakeney residence. Suburbs. The old Gainesville Mansions. The view of the lake. Last stop: Gainesville High.

In the case of the Contemporary Issues course, the NHF and the people at Gainesville attempted to implement the Humanities by introducing new and previously non-academic subjects into the curriculum. In the English class I want next to consider, the concern was not simply to open up the classroom's field of inquiry, but also to open its process, to vary its teaching techniques and so to create a more flexible milieu of exchange and engagement. Much more so than in the Contemporary Issues class, here the focus was on process rather than on relevant subject matter.

The teacher of this class, the chairman of the English Department, was one of the Gainesville faculty members who worked most closely with the NHF. She is an energetic, engaging woman who is always open to new ideas and anxious to open her students to them, to allow them "freedom of expression." When I sat in on her English class, I was astonished at her attempt to approach several unrelated topics in one class period. The class began with a film about Jaques Lipchitz, then went to a discussion of an abridged *War and Peace* film the class had recently seen (discussion was augmented by an overhead projector), and finally moved to a discussion of *The Grapes of Wrath* (the class outside reading assignment). When the class ended, I was unsettled, but it was not until I had visited other classes and talked to several other teachers that I could zero in on the problem. Opening up the class through the use of multi-media presentations and many texts had in effect broken down or diluted it in some important ways.

Since the NHF visit, all Social Studies and English classes have incorporated slides, recordings and multiple texts to a greater degree than ever before. Many of the teachers feel that the NHF made them aware of the vast new possibilities and put a whole store of new material at their fingertips. This certainly seems true, but once again the flexibility of this approach to the Humanities seems undermined by a confusion of expectations. The class too easily devolves into an audio-visual smorgasbord, subtly allowing the students to lay back and wait for the 'entertainment' to engage them. Several of the teachers I spoke to expressed dissatisfaction

with over-dependence on a multi-media approach, others seemed uncomfortable with it; one teacher even claimed that when he switched the projector on, the students switched themselves off automatically: “Oh, here comes another one of them dumb films.”

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FLASH: I am sitting in the Principal's Office in a Southern high school in Northern Georgia. Crew-cut Curtis Segars. A nice guy. Talks straight. Or does he? 700 students, 44 faculty. Get that down. The new vo-tec wing. The wide socio-economic range of the student body. The work study program that allows students working the night shift in local factories to miss one or two morning classes. Fewer dropouts than ever before. Cross-cultural interchange is more a function of time than anything else. How can I interpret this? Did he say that? Tell him your criticism of Contemporary Issues. He agrees openly. He is eager to hear what I have to say. I must be missing the point. Why do I keep fingering the wall with the index finger of my left hand? An apple bulges my right jacket pocket. I wish someone else were here that I could check with—like two policemen watching a UFO.

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When I first became acquainted with the NHF and the Gainesville project, I was struck by the possible discrepancy between the tone of NHF statements of aim and evaluation and student experience at Gainesville. My first question was, “How has the NHF involvement affected the quality of student experience in this Southern high school?” To no one's surprise, I found that, indeed, student experience is surprisingly resilient in the face of innovation and ‘educationese’: boredom, occasional fascination, insecurity, competitiveness, perhaps a desire to excel, are still staples of most high school students' classroom lives. School is still school. What, then, had been the success of the NHF project?

Clearly, the impact the NHF visit had on those people from Gainesville who were personally involved was tremendous.



Several teachers still spoke energetically and enthusiastically about the project; years later, they seemed still charged up from their encounter with the NHF. They looked to me with a degree of eagerness and respect that derived from their associating me with the NHF. On my third and last day at the high school, I met with two of the teachers who had been involved in the project, and they looked to me for my comments and suggestions. But I represented to them, I think, not only an official observer, but also a concerned one, one who simply by virtue of his separate circumstances and viewpoints could offer them interesting and perhaps uniquely constructive criticism.

I articulated my observations and concerns to them as best I could. They received them well, agreed with many of them, and responded to them all. The moment of that exchange was a truly Humanitarian one. It was a shared moment of encounter, interpretation and articulation. I was adapting to unfamiliar circumstances and providing what seemed a necessary service. I realized then, and have realized since then, how vitally important the NHF visit was to Gainesville and to the Humanities, but not necessarily for the curricular revisions it initiated as much as the process of a diverse group of people coming together to define a task and accomplish it. That the dynamic exchange of the NHF program and my visit could take place bears witness to the survival and potential energy of the Humanities.

I do not want at all to diminish the success or significance of the project by making it sound like a successful introductory T-group session. The learning that went on between the National Humanities Faculty and the Gainesville Faculty was humane education at its best: learning to appreciate the relativity of *your* own vision and the various modes of adjusting, evaluating and communicating it, and at the same time re-affirming the rigor of *your* own principles, intellectual discrimination, and integrity. A sense of relativity that reinforces integrity. That last afternoon, the two teachers and I spoke for quite a while about what I termed the 'group dynamic' of the NHF project, and they agreed with me that one of the most wonderful and far-reaching effects

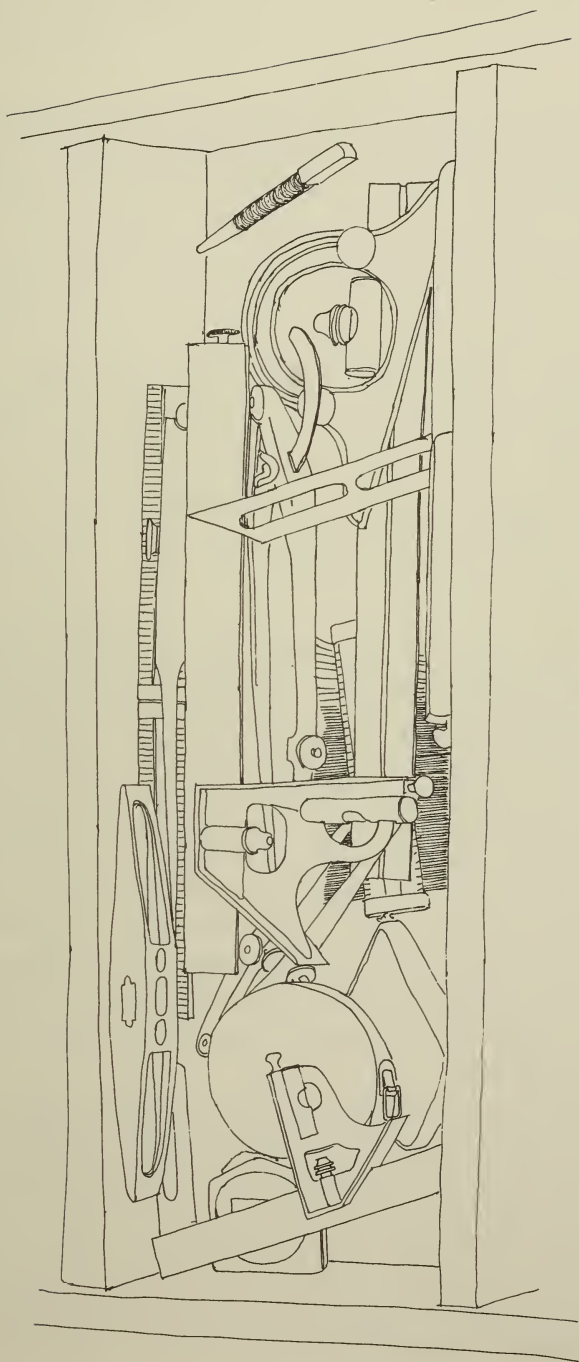
of the project was the group ethic that evolved in the school—faculty and students alike.

To achieve an education that is both humane and responsible to cultural heritage and social norms, I believe a more fundamental transformation must occur than can ever be achieved within the limits of the individual classroom. Whether that transformation is best achieved by deschooling society or by separating and strengthening the various modes of learning into complementary learning environments is for me now a fascinating question. But when I left Gainesville, I was just tired, sorely in need of a tape recorder, prepared for my return to New England, and hungry enough to take a good-size chunk out of any imaginary apple.

### M O U T H

Under the ground where it's crowded and lonely  
wise men trade off their truths for something lighter.  
Protagoras proved that everything is true.  
Gregorias taught that everything is false.  
The saddest part of a dead logician's anatomy:  
his mouth.

MICHAEL WOLFE



# The Very Fabric of the Civilized Mind

*Entire Affection Hateth Nicer Hands*

A. BARTLETT GIAMATTI

Genres, of life and literature, never follow rules; rather they establish rules as they go along. We are constantly justifying what we want by what we have, and that is never what we would have preferred. We never achieve what, from reading a page or two, from a simple commencement, we would have ideally projected. Despite all our commencements, we are constantly re-vising, and in revision we keep hoping for some vision that won't change or won't have to be changed. Of course, as students and teachers, as people who live in the world, we ought to know about this process of continuous adjustment. We ought to know because in a real sense that is what education is, and is about: it is and is about the constant give and take between aspiration and accommodation.

Needs not a ghost come from the grave to tell us that education is a process of amendment, of envisioning and establishing limitations. Those are traditional assumptions about education.

They are assumptions that finally go back to the Renaissance and to the development of a sense of perspective. As we know,

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The Commencement Address delivered at the Bread Loaf School of English, Middlebury College, August, 1973.



the Renaissance developed two senses of perspective, a sense of perspective in space, that insight which consciously methodized and exploited in theory and practice from the *quattro-centro* on, gave us a new sense of the uniqueness of an object in space and the uniqueness of each perceiver's visual organization; and a sense of perspective in time, what we call a sense of history, the realization of the distance and difference, the radical separation, in time between *then* and *now*, *that* event and *this* one, thus giving us a perception of the uniqueness and transitoriness of a given human event. These different ideas of perspective both emphasized the radical uniqueness of person and thing and, by implication or method, the corrosive friction of mutability on person and thing. And they provided the immediate context in which Humanists developed those assumptions about education that we like to think we still embody.

And what were or are these assumptions? They are the familiar ones about the humane studies that were substantially unquestioned through the 19th century and into the first two or three decades of our own century: the integration of the old liberal arts, from the medieval *trivium* and *quadrivium*, with newer mathematically-based scientific knowledge; the increasing centrality of the human mind as not only the instrument but also the object of inquiry; the radical emphasis on the spoken and written word—the rhetorical underpinning whose profound implication was that if education was not religiously based, it was at least ethically inspired. Finally, the Humanists' informing perspective was that education was essential to civility and polity, to a well-ordered human society. They believed that education was an artificial process, a shaping, a fashioning, a forming, something like what a sculptor does, meant to develop the ethical wisdom of the ancients and the Church, a process whose final goal was to show the ethically educated individual how to direct his private impulses to the public good. I know of no one who put the Humanist educator's position better than Richard Mulcaster, for twenty-five years headmaster of Merchant Taylor's School, who said in his *The First Part of the Elementarie* (1582):

For as those, which serue in publik function do turn their learning to publik use, which is the naturall vse of all learning: so such as liue to themselues either for pleasur in their studye, or to avoid foren truble do turn their learning to a priuate ease, which is the priuate abuse of a publik good. For the common weall is the measure of everie man being, which if anie one respect not, he is not to liue in it. (*Elementarie*, Campagnac ed., pp. 13-14)

Humanism linked education to politics, the one to the many, the best of the individual and the unique to the good of the commonality.

But while Humanism was a program of radical education, it was a method, not an ideology. At its best, it was designed to develop a flexible means of inquiry, not a preconceived message. It was meant to describe a way of proceeding—with an implicit goal, certainly—but not necessarily prescribe the result. Education was linked to politics—one was meant to be led out into the city—but education was not “politicized” in the sense that the activity of the mind was supposed to displace or deny the activity of the city or state. Contemplation was meant therefore to issue into informed action, and not become the only permissible, because pure, activity itself. The displacement of the impurities of the city by the alleged purity of intellect is a peculiarly modern fiction, and dilemma.

It is in the last forty years that we have begun most clearly to witness the confusion rather than the alliance of education and politics. Since the Depression, we have watched a process gradually harden into a goal unto itself. The fundamental alliance of education and politics has so disintegrated that now we seem to accept the perverse notion that schools, particularly colleges and universities, are supposed to be sanctuaries from society instead of tributaries into it. Particularly in the last ten years, it has been the rare faculty that has asserted as a group that its function was to do anything except propound immutable moral truth. Yet this is not surprising; for several academic generations now, college

and university professors have asserted the evils of other systems—such as business, or any number of governmental, careers—and were never disturbed by the implicit conflict between inquiry and ideology until their system, their political structure, their self-contained exercise, was attacked at its very roots for being “irrelevant.” Which is to say, not so much for being out of date as out of touch.

The “radical” student, so loathed for his aesthetic insensitivity and his inability to listen to anyone else, was in crucial ways precisely the product of an educational system which has asserted the baseness of financial life, the inherent impurity of political activity, the insensitivity of any value system that was not already enshrined in the academy. Indeed, in grim ways, many of the campus “radicals” were apt pupils of those who had always identified an attack on the Academy as an attack on the intellect—so completely had many academics presumed to have captured all the mental and moral prowess from every other facet of society and to have contained it within the Academy. Most academics are congenitally incapable of distinguishing between what is anti-intellectual and what is anti-academic. They are, in reality, very different phenomena. That powerful strain of anti-intellectualism in American life that you have heard so much about is usually identified by a professor who assumes that the only authentic values lie within his system and that any questioning of his procedures and norms is an effort to unravel the very fabric of the Civilized Mind.

So the “radical” student, outfitted for peace at the Army-Navy Store, with his coded cries about relevance and community and his roomful of stereos, cameras, and electric typewriters—each item an icon in his new spirituality, his devotion to the New Music, the New Art of Photography, the New Communication—the radical student, whose deepest dream was to bring about the Revolution and get graduation credit for it—provided both a savage parody of much of the academic world and the deepest threat to that system.

A parody is a burlesque but also a critique, one style implicitly

signaling the weakness of another, dominant style. And so while your average radical or radical groupie was endlessly indulging in endlessly “symbolic gestures”—which is what you call closing a class to stop a war—they were unconsciously spoofing the academic mentality that thinks that when it has said something, it has done something. But in a deeper way, they were criticizing that mentality. The only genuine paradox in the radical vocabulary was the slogan that said—Shut it down to open it up. And here was the real threat, for in the sloganeering about “community” (which, to their chagrin, urban blacks found out usually meant them) and about the world out there, the dissidents were not only exercising the middle class’s God-given right to hate itself; they were also making a genuine point about the massive insularity, the self-willed separation, of the campus from the city or larger society.

In many different ways, from within the institution and without, American higher education was being asked a very hard question, and that was: if you know so much, what can you *do*? By those within and without, who in many cases had been within and had dropped out, institutions were being challenged to put their muscle where their moral mouths were. If they were so sure of the purity of their values as compared to all others’, why couldn’t they purge the impurities of other people’s lives? And the institutions, and their faculties, answered in two ways—one old way and one new.

The old way was to say that it wasn’t their job to be practical instruments—they, the colleges and universities, were free market-places of ideas. This, however, didn’t work any more. It was increasingly obvious that these institutions were intensely practical when it came to taking Federal Funds, i.e., taxpayers’ money, a ritual involving even higher, pragmatic mysteries such as indirect recovery costs, and the like. The old answer of the “free marketplace” did not work because to many students, many trustees (representing segments of the outside world) and other civilians, the peculiar political structure and mores of the academy—the rules for hiring and firing, promotion and, of course, tenure—did



not look like models of or for freedom in any sense. And they are not. What many professors, scornfully and justifiably once called the SDS—a participatory oligarchy—could also have been said (but never was) of most academic departments. Parody was the dominant style.

Finally, the old answer of the “free marketplace” did not work to justify the ways of colleges to communities because where “free” seemed misleading, “marketplace” gave the real game away. Indeed, “free marketplace of ideas” is a complete metaphor, as we know, capitalistic in thrust and intention, and insofar as it refers to notions of academic freedom and individual merit, the phrase seems to me valid and defensible. Where, however, it was vulnerable as a metaphor and a reality was not so much that the paperback Marxists found it objectionable *prima facie*, or that academics are not always Liberal in either a Manchester or a modern sense, but finally that educational institutions were trying to justify themselves in terms of a system they were legally exempt from and often intellectually opposed to. They were using the language of the City to deny any responsibility to the city. And many students and much of the world at large, for a variety of reasons, were not quite prepared for this combination of condescension and fastidious indifference. “Entire affection hateth nicer hands,” said the old poet; if you truly love, as you say, you must touch.

The old institutional justification, regardless of the genuine value that it contains along with the chaff of self-satisfaction, no longer persuaded, and all over America institutions public and private, large and small, found themselves in trouble. They were faced with a student population and a larger society that, in the midst of miserable foreign and domestic strife, suddenly took them seriously as what they had always claimed to be—centers of authentic moral authority—and were now applying all the certitudes of institutional education to the institutions themselves. The academic profession was baffled and riven—didn’t people know that it was a fallen world, that so much of what was said, in classrooms and faculty meetings, was just a way of talking, a

medium for hope, and not necessarily a call for real action?

And while faculties ruminated on the genuinely painful fate of having been seriously attended to, of having their play of the mind taken for earnest, administrations as usual had to do something. They, after all, were custodians of the wreckage. So college and university presidents began to tell hard truths—for some of them a novel and bracing experience in itself. They began to give the new answer, to the larger society, to legislators and alumni, to parents and students, and most pointedly to faculty themselves. The message went out that there was a limit to how much institutions could do to solve society's problems—problems which were suddenly reflected in and not at a distance from those institutions. Besides, educational institutions were there to educate, not to provide massive social service; besides, they were broke. And that was the real, new answer. The bulging sixties were over. In the presidential sweepstakes, the crisis managers, the lawyers who knew how to use injunctions to save their libraries, were suddenly out and economists were in. It was especially hard on Deans. Just when they had mastered the rhetoric of confrontations, of lettuce boycotts; had learned to tell a political prisoner from a sophomore on probation, they had to begin talking about wash transactions, input, throughput, and the bottom line. Suddenly everyone needed a summer school. The stock market and all it mystically meant had begun radically to re-structure institutions of higher learning in ways that the Savonarolas of the left had never hoped for, or even known about.

And now the new austerity has chastened everyone. What the students learned to their amazement in the worst excesses of the late sixties—that finally they were not different from other people, that they were as susceptible to manipulation and intellectual and emotional inflexibility as those they objected to, that simply to say Moral did not necessarily make something or anything so—was now apparent on an institutional level. Public institutions have begun to regret that they gnawed quite so vigorously on the taxpaying hand that fed them, for that hand, quite simply, has begun to withdraw. And private institutions, traditionally

more precariously self-sufficient and more insulated in every way, face the most severe challenge to their existence of this century.

All of these institutions are confronted with what can only be a continuing, not a passing, financial crisis. Because they are "labor intensive," these institutions are all susceptible to a rate of inflation at least two to three points higher than the national rate. The recruitment of worthy students and of financial aid funds are, in times of austerity, separate but closely related problems; unions of non-faculty "white collar" employees, and finally of faculties themselves, are just over the horizon, if not upon it, all over the country. So are tax problems; for municipalities in desperate financial straits are going to have to seek relief for their hideous array of problems at the expense of those tax-exempt institutions in their midst. Finally, nothing will be as lively or divisive as the long wars to be fought under the banners of Affirmative Action—struggles involving most obviously the recruitment and employment of minorities and women. This engagement has only just begun and will be seen, depending on your perspective, as either: Another assault by the Government on Higher Education's integrity and mission, and as the imposition of quotas and bureaucratic insensitivity on the most precious area of humane values and democratically inspired ideals of individual merit (there will be a good deal of imagery about bastions and siege from partisans of this point of view—telling imagery); or it will be seen as The Government's, specifically HEW's, execution of a Congressional mandate to insure equal opportunity for all citizens, as guaranteed by the Constitution, and as only an application by the Government to Higher Education of precisely those legal and moral norms that Higher Education was, in so many other ways, recently applying to the Government. In the sixties, it appeared that the fate of American education at all levels was to be decided in the hallways and streets, but the fact is, I think, that it will be decided in crucial ways in the seventies in the courts.

Though everyone's perception of it will be different, my sense is that there has been a change in the way education is perceived

and that way it will work, and that change will mean a greater responsiveness by all the educational establishments to political obligations—"political" in the sense described earlier as the legitimate ethical obligations the individual or individual institution has to the larger commonweal. If this in fact is true, it will call upon all the adroitness and skill of teachers and administrators to see that in the negotiations between private obligations and public demands, the baby is not thrown out with the bath, that the necessary mission and shaping functions of intellectual inquiry remain intact while the smugness and self-satisfied isolation of the enterprise are stripped away. It is going to be a very tough time, the next five or so years, but if a spirit of accommodation, of enlightened compromise, is stifled within colleges, and between colleges and cities, for whatever reason, then we will have learned nothing from our past or our present. For the spectacle of the campuses three to five years ago, or of the Federal administration this summer—the ironic spectacle of the most devoted destroying what they most valued because of the arrogant assumption that there were no higher values or other perspectives than those contained in their systems—are different only if one insists on the very attitude that brought both about, that is, only if one insists on "them" and "us," only if one asserts that there is no common cause but only enclaves of Truth.

I know this brief description of some recent events, a limited, partial account, one perspective only, may sound remote from your concerns, either here at Bread Loaf or back home. But, if I may assert one last time something no one else believes, I do not think they are remote from your concerns. For the secondary schools, public and private, always feel the pressures exerted by and exerted on the colleges in concentrated form. And whether we talk about slashing library budgets or mounting taxpayer pressure, about increased costs or a brutal scarcity of jobs, these are going increasingly to be felt—as they already have been—in the secondary schools. In a situation of the tense fluidity of this one, the belated impulses to reform curriculum and attitude—particularly strong now in private schools—will run headlong into



increasing alumni and community pressure to conform to financial pressures. Both competing realities will have legitimate claims. I hope you will resist the impulse to withdraw into academic or professional isolation, as I hope I do, though I know it is tough to resist the temptation to retreat because secondary-school teachers are exposed to more pressures from the outside. High schools of all kinds are always at the mercy of whatever curricular need, or fad, is generated by the colleges, while at the same time, secondary schools are even more vulnerable to school board or trustee pressures than colleges are. We will all have different contexts of contradictory pressures, but we will finally share very similar kinds of problems. My only hope is that, much as everyone's responses will be in part dictated by his different contexts, none of us ought to assume that our old and easy assumptions about the inevitable inviolability and superiority of our calling will, or should, suffice. They will not. My theme is that those assumptions are in part at least responsible for our predicament. To preserve what we think is valuable in what we do will, I think, mean that we will have to be able to change in ways many of us will find very difficult.

## DOLLARS

Each week the school demerits piled up high  
against his name like the great bell's loud tolling  
for breakfast or for class, and these marks hung  
dancing at the masters' belts like scalps each day

detached from his renewing scapegoat's head.  
Each week his feet shuffled the miles allotted  
for walking off the penalties they notched  
against his name. He went the distance, hatted  
against the great sun in spring, the sharp wind  
the winter cultivated, the oak leaves  
each fall. Uncertain whether he could mend,  
anxious to satisfy, to earn reprieves,

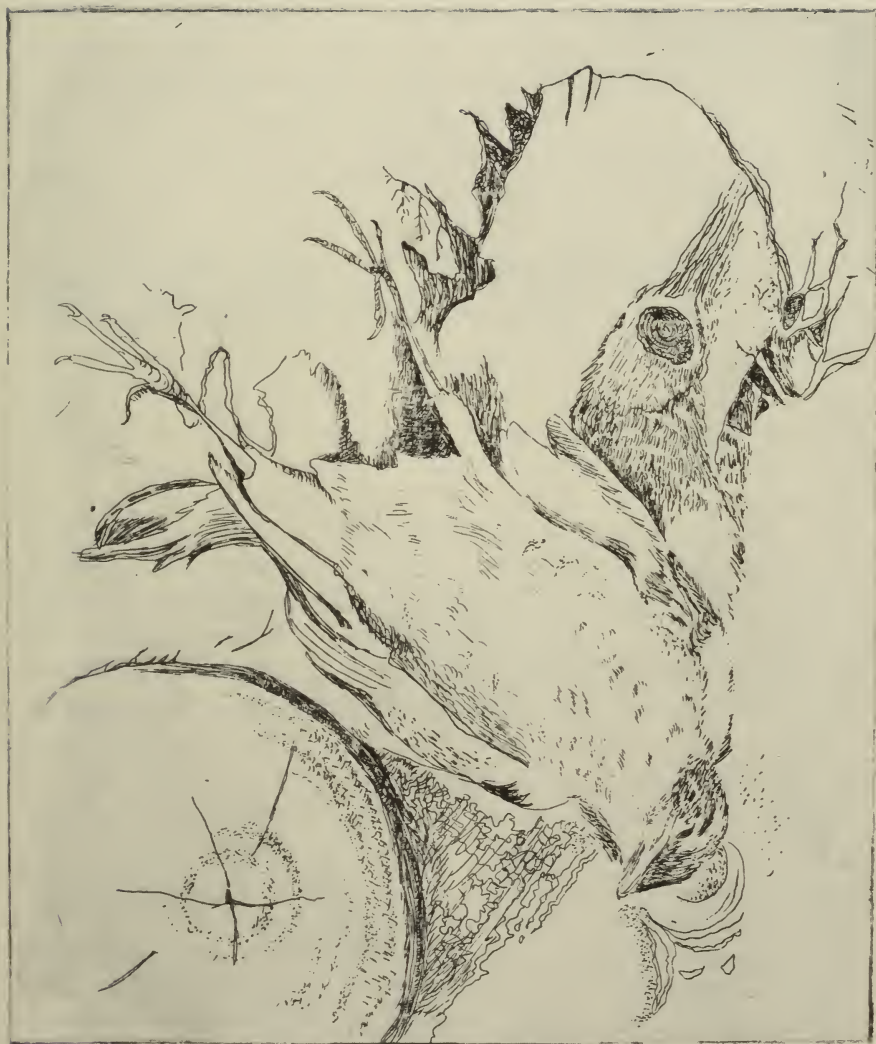
he strode and strode. He passed the other boys  
dawdling in circuit like a message sent  
syllable by syllable. Speed destroys  
the purpose of the masters' punishment!

The lucky other schoolmates at their tennis  
or en route to town, the rush of sudden colors  
to the autumn trees, a note of joy, of menace  
in the song of thrush or blackbird, whirled like dollars

to be spent by others but to be discarded  
by him whose bank account was empty. Spurred,  
he lapped the other pilgrims, and he gained  
goals he did not grasp or thought absurd.

Then one day in his competence at hurry  
he plunged a thousand leagues into his death.  
They rang the bell and sighed and strode to bury  
the youth in woods where he had caught his breath.

ARCHIBALD HENDERSON



## Book Reviews

### *Moral isolationists at heart*

*The High School Revolutionaries*, edited by  
Marc Libarle and Tom Seligson (New York:  
Random House, 1970)

Reviewed by DAVID M. SMITH

Thought and thought-substitutes are so much a matter of fashion these years than one should not be surprised to find a three-year-old book passé. Though *ars* may still occasionally be *longa*, what passes for social criticism in a society saturated by television is as *brevis* as can be, and the latest analysis has little more life-expectancy than the latest wardrobe. But, prepared though I was for future shock, *The High School Revolutionaries* hit me hard: what I, once a devoted fan of Paul Goodman, Neil Postman, John Holt, and A. S. Neill, perhaps wanted from this collection of essays by teenage leftists was a boost for my own sagging educational radicalism; what I found, alas, was a set of quaint period pieces redolent with the aroma of mothballs. The sensation of reading the book reminded me, in fact, of prying open a musty trunk in the attic and discovering a faded madras jacket and a couple of knit ties with fraying square ends. Did I really ever wear that stuff? And will I ever want to put it on again?

What makes the collection so hard to take seriously in retrospect is the refusal of its contributors to argue. With few exceptions, these kids represent Charles Reich's *Consciousness III*, if not in their strong political orientation, in their contempt for linear



thinking. In place of such plain intellectual fare they substitute banquets of bombast, stock rhetoric, and romantic posturing, all sauced liberally (or rather, they would insist, radically) with their considerable naiveté. One can only wince at Joe Harris' faith in the discriminatory power of bullets and dynamite as he explain his program for revolutions: "Firebombs, guns, explosives, riots, as long as they don't harm the people in any way, must and will be used by the people to liberate the schools." Tom Doland seems similarly deluded in describing how he and his friends carried out a window-breaking guerilla raid on the administration building of their boarding school "to show how serious we were about the issues." In a slightly more laughable vein is the precocity of Jim Gardiner, who, at 13, writes that "A march or a demonstration is a beautiful, esthetic entity: it can be a fair, fickle woman, lovely in expectation, orgasmic at its frenzied peak, and feminine in its acceptance of failure." (How about that, Ms. Steinem?) Jim goes on to tell the story of a campaign he waged in eighth grade to win students the right to leave school grounds at lunch time. Having been foiled by a tyrannical principal, he concludes that violent action for a non-captive lunch would have been well justified and, in the same breath, that "The United States enslaves, oppresses, silences, and murders to extend the scope of its power, its empire."

The most painful effect of such bathos is that it makes its perpetrators such easy marks for condescension of the sort I've just indulged in. Marc Libarle and Tom Seligson, who edited *The High School Revolutionaries*, complain in their preface that the *New York Times* has stigmatized them and their comrades as "Revolutionaries Who Have to Be Home by 7:30." And although much of the writing in the book suggests that this stigma is quite appropriate, we would be wrong to ignore the few mature voices and even more wrong not to recognize that the malaise of a school or society may be serious in direct proportion to the silliness and ineptitude of the revolutionaries which it produces.

Some of the contributors are neither silly nor inept. They present grievances which are real in language which has the dignity

of a direct response to experience. A major theme of the book is racism; essay after essay documents convincingly the prejudice of teachers north and south. Another theme is the boredom which results from stultifying teaching methods and from curricula which students see as wholly disconnected from the needs of their lives. Joshua Mamis, a 12-year-old at I. S. 44 in New York, tells about "writing" teachers, whose classes do nothing but copy from the blackboard for periods at a time. Two girls from a high school in Erie, Pa., detail similar atrocities: 20 minutes wasted in attendance-taking, rote memorization practiced even in honors courses, literature like *Hamlet* reduced to the most sterile objective questions and answers. N. K. Jamal, another New Yorker, writes angrily and persuasively of the whitewashed world which confronts slum kids when they step inside the classroom door, of the middle-class fantasies which are dangled before them as distractions from their mean and squalid surroundings.

A central point of Jamal and others is that the relationship between young people and society is remorselessly weighted in favor of society, that the manpower needs of a gigantic marketing and fighting complex pinch painfully on the potentiality of individuals. In my opinion, this sense of limitation and repression of possibilities, stripped of its insurrectionist rhetoric, represents the essence of the students' complaint. What they fear and resent most is not, despite their strident calls to resist fascist oppression on the barricades, any right-wing police action or specific violation of their constitutional rights but rather the slow narrowing in of their lives, the grinding process of socialization, and the entangling of their richly imagined futures in a network of real commitments and responsibilities. They don't want prefab careers, and therefore they reject the demands of an institution, the school, which works on the assumption that prefab careers are what they want. Moreover, they are reluctant to allow that anyone else can claim any part of them at all: despite their repeated use of the word "brother," I find most of them to be moral isolationists at heart.

At their best, the high school revolutionaries both carry out

some effective muck-raking and establish themselves, at least tenuously, in a tradition of individualism which has resisted and, I hope, will continue to resist the depersonalizing pressures of a barracks society. At their worst, they indulge a childish impulse to ride the coattails of whatever intellectual fad happens to be cavorting by. But the best and worst alike, viewed in three years' perspective, seem to very, very gone. What has become of the Little Red Book and the underground newspaper? Where are the moratoria, the teach-ins, the petitions, and the armbands? And would we be more nearly right to say that our students have gotten back down to business or that they have gone back to sleep?

*A tract for the times*

*The Great School Legend: A Revisionist Interpretation of American Public Education*, by  
Colin Greer (New York: Basic Books, Inc.,  
1972)

Reviewed by DAVID B. TYACK

When Henry Adams was beginning his career as historian, a friend advised him "break glass!" Then as now, shattering legends has been a quick route to fame. In the last decade we have witnessed a blizzard of books questioning the traditional American faith in schooling. Some have been angry and polemic, some funereal, some massively scholarly. In *Equality of Educational Opportunity* James Coleman demonstrated that differences in school resources accounted for far less of the variance in pupil achievement than had previously been supposed. Christopher Jencks marshalled evidence in *Inequality* which cast doubt on the efficiency of schools in promoting social mobility. And in *The Great School Legend* Colin Greer has sought to demythologize the history of public education.

Greer's study falls far short of its goal. It is self-contradictory, simplistic, inaccurate. It distorts authors and side-steps complexities to make its points. This is all the more unfortunate since some readers will take it to be the best that revisionist historians can do, and that best none too good, at the very time when scholars are beginning to produce a new radical critique of American educational history comparable in power and insight to Merle Curti's classic of the 1930's, *The Social Ideas of American Educators*.

Greer tells us the legend: "Once upon a time there was a great nation which became great because of its public schools." The *truth*, he says, is that for the urban poor "it was in spite of, and *not* because of, compulsory public education that some eventually made their way." In standard debunking language he divides his book into two parts: "The Legend" and "What Really Happened."

Greer's "rosy picture" of the development of American public schools as the cause of all that was great and good in American society *might* be found in the optimistic rhetoric of naive promoters, though he provides little evidence of such grandiose claims. His main targets are sophisticated historians, Bernard Bailyn and Lawrence Cremin, whose ideas he grossly distorts. But his criticisms often turn out to be simple contradictions. On page 44 he writes that "Bailyn looked to colonial America for the roots of public education"; yet on page 48 he quotes Bailyn's own words: "Public education as it was in the late nineteenth century, and is now, had not grown from known seventeenth century seeds: it was a new and unexpected genus whose ultimate character could not have been predicted. . . ." Bailyn and Cremin do indeed have a more sanguine view of American society than does Greer, and both historians may overlook some of the uglier sides of their stories, but neither is a simple-minder booster.

When Greer turns to the substantive part of his book, his analysis of "what really happened," he presents as discovery some stubborn facts about schooling that have long been known to social scientists. "We can leave it to the historians of education to argue with Greer and other revisionists," writes Chicago sociologist Robert Havighurst, "as to whether the historians of education have been adequately aware of the facts concerning the school



achievement of children of poor families and of ethnic and racial minorities. Sociologists of education have known these facts and published them quite fully throughout this century." Of course, historians—one thinks especially of Horace Mann Bond—and Newton Edwards—have also written extensively about the gap between the dream of equality and actual injustice in schooling.

But more disconcerting than Greer's tone of angry discovery is the peculiar way he deals with the effects of schooling. Greer wisely warns that "historians should certainly be aware of the immense difficulty of any social science research designed to assess the precise 'influence' of the schools within the complex of social, environmental, and perhaps biological factors which are the substance of change." Then he boldly declares in his title for Chapter 5, "The Assimilation of the Immigrant: the School Didn't Do It." Thus it appears that only those who make claims about the *positive* influences of the public schools have to meet precise scholarly standards of proof, while Greer is free to assert that schools "translate spontaneity and impulsive creativity into the feelings of immobility, impotence, and anguish which dominate the lives of so many Americans of all ages." A strange world for teachers, in which they can take blame for all that is bad and no credit for what is good in American society! Possibly this may be good polemics, but surely not serious history.

Greer uses school surveys to document how consistently schools "failed" poor children (by which he apparently means high rates of drop-outs and repeaters, though his definition is unclear). He argues that such "failures" were functional and implies that they were deliberate, for the person who did not succeed in school would later blame himself or herself and not the social order if he or she remained poor in later life. The problem with the argument is that the very persons who were making the surveys, for the most part, thought that such "failures" were cruel and dysfunctional and did their best to eliminate age-grade retardation.

Greer asks important questions about the comparative school achievement of different ethnic groups and the relation of that achievement to later social mobility. He points out—accurately in my view—that the academic success of certain groups, such

as Jews, Scandinavians, or Chinese, often depended on the attitudes, skills, and economic status or aspirations characteristic of their families and communities, rather than on any particular virtue in the schools they attended. Conversely, he draws important parallels between the low school achievement of certain immigrant groups, like South Italians or Poles, and comparable experience of black students. In these chapters, and particularly in the one on black education, there are the beginnings of a useful analysis of how the schools *systematically* failed to adapt themselves to certain groups. And in his observations on the economy of scarcity in educational thought and practice, Greer underlines the success of schools in competitively selecting losers as well as winners. Nonetheless, because he is so eager to denigrate public education, Greer underestimates the degree to which some of the poor were successful in school (and thereby some of them achieved a degree of social mobility). As Robert Havighurst observes, "some children of poor and immigrant and black families have made full use of the schools to get ahead and become upwardly mobile. School performance is correlated with family socioeconomic status with a correlation coefficient only of the order of 0.4, which means that a good many pupils of low socioeconomic status do quite well in school." A more fine-grained and fair-minded analysis would have given a more accurate and useful historical perspective than Greer's on the important questions he raises.

Greer's central point, similar to that of Christopher Jencks', is hard to contest: Americans *have* been oversold on the schools as a means of ensuring equality and social justice. Public education is too indirect and inefficient a tool for accomplishing the massive social changes needed in American society. As Greer indicates, even over the very long haul compulsory schooling has not fulfilled its democratic promises (for that matter, what other idealistic agency has lived up to its rhetoric?). "*The Great School Legend*," wrote one radical school critic, "is the book we have been hungry for without quite knowing it." And that is precisely what it is: a tract for the times. But an accurate, tough minded—and hence genuinely useful—history it is not.

# Contributors

## ARTICLES

HERBERT BLAU, currently Director of the Inter-Arts Program at Oberlin, is noted as an author (*The Impossible Theater — A Manifesto*), playwright (*A Gift of Fury*), and director (*The Actor's Workshop* in San Francisco and the Lincoln Center Repertory Theater Company in New York City).

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